Recovery, Escape, and Consolation in the Secondary Worlds of *The Lord of the Rings*

Robyn Hazekamp

HZKROB001

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COMPULSORY DECLARATION

This work has not been previously submitted in whole, or in part, for the award of any degree. It is my own work. Each significant contribution to, and quotation in, this dissertation from the work, or works, of other people has been attributed, and has been cited and referenced.

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ABSTRACT

J.R.R. Tolkien's essay *On Fairy-Stories* lays out three essential functions that all good fairy stories should fulfil: recovery, escape, and consolation. To carry out these functions, the fairy story needs to create a believable Secondary World that is separate from the Primary World in which we live. In fact, Tolkien does this on two levels: the Secondary World of Middle-earth, and the inner Secondary World of the Elves.

The inner worlds of the Elves are set apart by numerous barriers, both physical and symbolic, which is most obvious in Lórien. These barriers are caused largely by the Elvish desire to avoid change and recapture the past; the timeless nature of the Elves, so often seen as positive but in fact noted by Tolkien as negative, causes their homes to be cut off in varying degrees from the rest of Middle-earth.

The careful separation of Elvish space aids in the effecting of Tolkien's three functions. The spatial separation, the clear differentiation of Elvish space from other spaces in Middle-earth, is useful because the heightened sense of beauty within them enables recovery for the characters and highlights the need for recovery in the reader. The way in which time moves differently inside these spaces, a result of the Elvish desire to slow the passage of time and thus avoid change, enhances the opportunities for escape for the reader while at the same time warning of the danger of too much escape. Finally, Elvish immortality is contrasted with human mortality in order to bring about various forms of consolation.

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INTRODUCTION

In 1952, Collins Publishing rejected J.R.R. Tolkien's most popular work, *The Lord of the Rings*, deeming it too long and too expensive to publish.[1] Given that the book has built up a large and loyal fan base since its publication and was recently voted "book of the century" in England,[2] the publishing company would appear to have made a grievous error. Despite its length and, for the time, unusual subject matter, the book struck a chord with many readers and has cemented its place as one of the greatest fantasy books of our time. The appeal for Tolkien's work lies not only in the adventure story that he tells or in the entertaining characters he describes, but also – and perhaps most of all – in the concrete, vivid realness of the world he creates. Middle-earth is filled with Elves, orcs, hobbits, but despite the presence of these and other fantastic elements, it is so internally consistent that it is convincing as a place.

Many fantasy stories have attempted to imitate Tolkien's feat, and many have failed to reach the same level of convincing detail that he achieved. Tom Shippey has said that no one can ever match him in "sheer quantity of effort, in building the maps and the languages and the histories and the mythologies of one invented world, as no one is ever again going to have his philological resources to draw on".[3] Tolkien achieved such admirable detail because he created the background of the story, the history of the world in which the book takes place, before he ever wrote the book itself, and he did so in order to

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[1] Bramlett, 2002; Beahm, 2003

[2] Bramlett, 2002

[3] Shippey in Beahm, 2003, p. 26

provide a context for the languages he invented.[4] In the process, he created an excellent example of what, in his essay *On Fairy-Stories*, he called a Secondary World. Secondary Worlds operate on two levels in the text: Middle-earth itself is one, and inside that are several others created by the Elves. The most notable of these is Lórien. The Secondary Worlds of the Elves within the Secondary World of Middle-earth allow Tolkien to enact the three functions of fairy stories as he sees them: recovery, escape, and consolation.

The Secondary World, according to Tolkien, creates Secondary Belief. Tolkien differentiates between normal suspension of disbelief and Secondary Belief: ordinary belief is the recognition that something can happen in the real world. "Literary" belief, or "willing suspension of disbelief",[5] occurs when someone forcibly, as it were, deliberately holds him- or herself in a state of acceptance of what he or she is reading or seeing.[6] This, Tolkien says, is the lower kind of belief, when one looks in on a fantasy world from the outside, possibly feeling "obliged to stay", and it is a "substitute for the genuine thing, a subterfuge we use when condescending to games or make-believe, or when trying... to find what virtue we can in the work of an art that has for us failed".[7] True Secondary Worlds, however, can create a state of true belief, Secondary Belief, where no suspension is necessary: the author creates a kind of spell that holds the reader in this true belief for the duration of the story.[8] The best

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[4] Noel, 1977

[5] Coleridge, 1962, p. 442

[6] Tolkien, 1964, p. 36

[7] Tolkien, 1964, p. 37

[8] Tolkien, 1964

kind of fantasy creates a Secondary World and engages the reader in this Secondary Belief[9].

If an author can successfully create Secondary Belief, going beyond a willing suspension of disbelief to the point where the reader actually seems to enter the story, then he or she has made a Secondary World that holds the reader. To do so is not easy: "To make a Secondary World inside which [a] green sun will be credible, commanding Secondary Belief, will probably require labour and thought, and will certainly demand a special skill, a kind of Elvish craft".[10] This choice of words is interesting, indicating that Tolkien believes that Elves do possess this skill, and in fact they do exercise it to create Secondary Worlds of their own in *The Lord of the Rings*. The creator of a Secondary World must be able to describe that world in such a way that everything inside it is consistent with everything else. Tolkien seems to succeed at this daunting task; Lionel Basney notes:

> Not all fantasy... is so successful as Tolkien's at creating a world that seems to possess solidity, orderliness, and integrity as well as vivacity and colour. The reader's sensation in *The Lord of the Rings* is that he can trust the vision presented... to be wholly coherent and consistent within itself.[11]

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[9] Where Coleridge sees suspension of disbelief as essentially positive, Tolkien sees it as a lower form of belief, as mentioned. Tolkien's view of Secondary Belief ties in to Coleridge's idea of Secondary Imagination. Where Primary Imagination is, for Coleridge, the agent of human perception – where the act of perception is an act of imagination repeating, in a lesser sense, the act of creation in the mind of the "infinite I AM", Secondary Imagination is self-conscious. It echoes Primary Imagination but is "different in degree and in mode of operation", a willing creation of new forms (Hobson, 1998, p. 107). This is the kind of imagination needed to create a fantasy world that will draw the reader in.

[10] Tolkien, 1964, p. 45

[11] Basney, 2004, p. 184

Tolkien's world is ruled by laws, both moral and natural, that are similar to ours, though not always the same; nevertheless, they are entirely consistent within that world.

By Tolkien's reasoning, a true Secondary World would take on the quality of myth: "myth is neither allegory nor historical document, but a true secondary world born out of language, to be experienced, not excavated".[12] Fantasy, then, ideally depicts a world that is different from the Primary World (the real world), and does so in such a way that this Secondary World is believable. Colin Manlove points out:

> The aim is to present fiction as if it were fact, to make the material seem independent of the author. The less 'invented' the world of a fantasy seems, the more true and free of control it will also appear. For Tolkien, the aim of the fantasist is the 'realisation, independent of the conceiving mind, of imagined wonder' (*TL*, p. 19).[13]

This imagined wonder cannot exist if the author does not create a convincing world that is internally consistent and enables the reader to accept what is read as true.

The author achieves this feat through sub-creation. He or she manufactures a "Secondary World which your mind can enter. Inside it, what he relates is 'true': it accords with the laws of that world. You therefore believe it, while you are, as it were, inside".[14] The consistency of the laws of the Secondary World is essential for encouraging Secondary Belief. Sub-creation is so-called not

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[12] Batasar, 2004, p. 19

[13] Manlove, 1975, p. 169

[14] Tolkien, 1964, p. 47

only because primary creation, for Tolkien, refers to the creation of the world and everything in it but also because in order to be realistic, sub-creation needs to draw on facets of the primary world. Consistency with what the reader knows to be true and consistency within the created world, so that any rules different from those in the Primary World are adhered to, is necessary to maintain belief. The Secondary World lasts only as long as the reader is reading and, importantly, accepts what is being read as real on its own terms. In other words, it is only effective as long as the sub-creator keeps the world believable.

While one might think that calling a human being a creator might cause a clash with Tolkien's religious beliefs, he sees it in the opposite way: human acts of creation are a reflection of and a tribute to the being that made us. Stradford Caldecott says that *The Lord of the Rings* is "not a book *about* religion, but it is the expression of a religious soul under God".[15] By this he means that, apart from the religious imagery in the book, in Tolkien's view, the very act of sub-creation is a tribute to God because he created humans with the imagination to make creations of their own. Tolkien argues that although fantasy can be misused, so can almost everything else in the world. "Fantasy remains a human right," says Tolkien; "we make in our measure and in our derivative mode, because we are made: and not only made, but made in the image and likeness of a Maker".[16] Creation of a new world, a Secondary World, is not a challenge to the maker of the Primary World or an insinuation

[15] Caldecott, 2002, para. 5

[16] Tolkien, 1964, p. 50

that the primary act of creation can be replicated. Instead, the Creator of that Primary World gave humanity the ability to mimic that creation on a smaller scale for a reason, so invention of this kind should be encouraged.

Not only does sub-creation honour the Creator, it is also unavoidable because, if humans are modelled after that Creator, as the Bible says they are, then they *must* have a degree of creativity of their own. Donald Williams says, "Human beings are creatures who can write irreducible stories... because they derive their own irreducibility from the Creator".[17] Sub-creation of a new, fictional world is thus a tribute to the Maker because it stems from a characteristic that the Creator passed on to its creations. Tolkien's views on this reflect Coleridge's ideas on the Primary and Secondary Imagination. Coleridge saw Secondary Imagination, the driving force behind the creation of literature, as "an 'echo' of the Primary Imagination, which is 'the living Power and prime Agent of all human Perception, and as a repetition in the finite mind of the eternal act of creation in the infinite I AM'".[18] This means that the creative imagination has worth simply because it results from the greater Imagination that engendered it; making a Secondary World out of nothing is an act of creation that echoes the Maker of the Primary World.

Tolkien could thus connect his act of creating a Secondary World to an act of drawing attention to his beliefs in the doctrine of Catholicism. Although he insisted that his book is not in the least allegorical and has in fact clearly

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[17] Williams, 2006, p. 46

[18] Ryan, 2004, p. 116

expressed his dislike for allegory,[19] he has described *The Lord of the Rings* as a "fundamentally religious and Catholic work".[20] It can be fundamentally religious without being allegorical not only because it contains many references to Catholic teachings and images, such as Galadriel being based on the Virgin Mary,[21] but because, as seen in *On Fairy-stories,* Tolkien believes that the very act of creating the Secondary World honours his Creator. Even more than this, the happy ending creates eucatastrophe, the joy of a happy ending that reflects the greater joy found in Catholic mythology. According to this, it would be difficult for any fairy story with a happy ending *not* to be a Catholic work of sorts. Tolkien uses his Elves and their immortality to emphasise the eucatastrophe at the end of his story. This is aided by the fact that he separates the Elves into their own Secondary Worlds by using clear boundaries, giving them a different attitude to time, and constantly reminding the reader of their extended lifespan.

Elves and the "Green World"

Tolkien's Elves are portrayed as a mystical, if not magical, people. They are surrounded by an aura of mystery and often inspire feelings of awe, fear or both in various characters; even Treebeard the Ent describes Lórien with trepidation in *The Two Towers.* This mystery is emphasised by the fact that whenever Elves are shown in groups in the book, whether that be Gildor Inglorion and his group at the beginning or the Elves at Rivendell and Lórien, they are set apart from the other characters in Middle-earth both spatially and

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[19] Purtill, 1984, Chism, 2003

[20] Carpenter in Pearce, 2005, p. 119

[21] Maher, 2003

temporally. When hobbits or Men visit the homes of Elves, the text is riddled with mentions of time acting differently and of the world of the Elves being somewhat dreamlike. Venturing into Rivendell, Lórien, and even Mirkwood means venturing into a place separate from the rest of the world, where closeness to nature and slowed time are emphasised. This separation in space is indicative of a border, as it were, between the Secondary World of the novel and another concentric Secondary World within it.

The Secondary World created (or sub-created) by the author is not completely different from ours, in fact holding much in common, but it has certain elements that are portrayed in an unusual, fresh way. Tolkien says:

> The realm of fairy-story is wide and deep and high and filled with many things: all manner of beasts and birds are found there; shoreless seas and stars uncounted; beauty that is an enchantment, and an ever-present peril; both joy and sorrow as sharp as swords. In that realm a man may, perhaps, count himself fortunate to have wandered, but its very richness and strangeness tie the tongue of a traveller who would report them.[22]

In fairy stories, the world is our world but heightened and distilled; Faërie is beautiful, but dangerous. Ordinary things that people find in the real world occur in fairy stories as well, but because they are separated from the kinds of things people encounter in the Primary World – cars, factories, noise – and instead are paired with things both dangerous and beautiful, even the familiar seems new and different. This makes everything, both familiar and unfamiliar, difficult to describe. While *The Lord of the Rings* certainly fits this description, Middle-earth is not the only Secondary World in the books. The Elves create smaller Secondary Worlds inside Middle-earth, keeping Lothlórien and, to a

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[22] Tolkien, 1964, p. 11

lesser extent, Rivendell and Mirkwood apart from the places surrounding them. The Elves exert an influence on their homes: their time runs differently from mortal time, there are clear borders around their spaces, and their reluctance to change causes stagnation that brings a kind of sterility to the beauty of their lands.

The influence that they have is due at least partially to the Three Rings, two of that are wielded by Elrond and Galadriel and give the Elves the powers of "understanding, making, and healing, to preserve all things unstained".[23] This explains why the differences between Elvish and mortal space are clearest in Rivendell and Lórien. Despite the fact that these homesteads are situated in what should be simple woods, Tolkien constantly describes them as enchanted in an indefinable way; outsiders see them as dangerous, and they are filled with the joy the Elves find in their connection with nature as well as the sorrow they feel at the passing of the years. Those characters in the book that visit Elvish places and try to describe them later inevitably fail to do so with any accuracy. This confusion combined with the naturally numinous nature of the Elves creates a sense of mystery around them that acts as a barrier between them and everyone else, and this barrier is only one of many, both mental and physical.

The most obvious example of an Elvish Secondary World would be Valinor in the West. Valinor is the place to which the Elves were called by the Valar, demi-gods of Tolkien's world. Eventually, some of the Elves departed Valinor

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[23] *FotR*, p. 352

and returned to Middle-earth, not to return until the end of the Third Age, which occurs just after *The Lord of the Rings* is set.[24] As Ruth Noel notes, "The Blessed Realm [is] isolated from Middle-earth both by the sea and by Evernight, a barrier of darkness between the mortal and immortal lands".[25] In other words, Valinor can only be reached by sailing from the Havens, west of the Shire, over the sea, and even then, only by Elves and a select few others. This means that the borders of Valinor are the most effective of all the Elvish spaces in the book, although it is also the least developed in *The Lord of the Rings.* Because it is inaccessible to all but the chosen few, and of course because it is over the sea, it stands as a world apart from Middle-earth.

However, the other Elvish spaces, Rivendell and Lothlórien in *The Lord of the Rings*, as well as places like Gondolin in *The Silmarillion*, are also separated – surrounded by danger, by physical borders such as rivers and mountains, and by rumours that disregard their very existence, making them difficult to track down. Lothlórien, being the most "Elvish" of the Elvish spaces in the book, is not surprisingly the most beset by rumour and mystery. The Lórien Elves have withdrawn from the world to such an extent that many of the humans surrounding them believe them to be nothing more than fairy tales. Many of the descriptions of the Elves in the book reflect their desire to be away from others in the world that they have created for themselves: their lack of intimate knowledge of the outside world – for example, Legolas has never even travelled as far as Fangorn, despite being old enough to have "seen many an

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[24] Flieger, 2002

[25] Noel, 1977, p. 52

oak grow from acorn to ruinous age",[26] and few of the Lórien Elves speak the Common Tongue – their reluctance to become involved with the Ring, and even the difficulty mortals have in finding them at all. Gildor puts it simply when he says, "The Elves have their own labours and their own sorrows, and they are little concerned with the ways of hobbits, or of any other creatures upon earth. Our paths cross theirs seldom, by chance or purpose".[27] If this is the case for the comparatively extroverted Elves near the Shire, it is doubly so for the Elves living in the closed-off world of Lórien.

This world, which is in every way a Secondary World according to Tolkien, has many similarities to a theory by Northrop Frye, which he calls the "drama of the green world".[28] Frye's green world "delimits a place of natural beauty and social transformation"[29] that "symbolises a different style of life – contemplation instead of action... music and love instead of the metallic clash of arms and the discordances of conspiracy".[30] It is a place in which the characters can escape from the realities of everyday life in order to resolve a problem brought about by society. In the green world, which Frye used specifically in relation to Shakespeare, the characters move from society to nature and back. The "green world" serves as the background for a metamorphosis; it is where characters become their true selves and the resolution is achieved before a return to the normal world. In other words, the

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[26] *TTT*, p. 187

[27] *FotR*, p. 112

[28] Frye, 1957, p. 182

[29] Burkman, 1987, p. 105

[30] Laroque, 1991, p. 193

green world is separate from the primary world and is a place where characters go to resolve conflicts that arise in the primary world.

Apart from purpose, the green world has a number of defining characteristics. Frye explains that it is often mysterious and/or magical, it "charges the comedies with the symbolism of the victory of summer over winter",[31] and it generally contains a female figure representing the "earth that produces the rebirth"[32] of summer. Finally, he points out that the green world:

> has analogies, not only to the fertile world of ritual, but to the dream world that we create out of our own desires. This dream world collides with the stumbling and blinded follies of the world of experience... Thus Shakespearian comedy illustrates... the archetypal function of literature in visualising the world of desire, not as an escape from "reality", but as the genuine form of the world that human life tries to imitate.[33]

In other words, the green world is to a large extent a combination of fantasy and reality: it is a world of desire not because people want to escape to it but because it is an "ideal" world to which people aspire.

Of course, *The Lord of the Rings* is not a Shakespearean comedy, but elements of Middle-earth generally agree with Frye's description of the green world, and Elvish spaces even more so. The two main Elvish spaces, Rivendell and Lórien, have the most in common with the green world, but even though this is true, they still have a key difference: the function of the Elvish Secondary Worlds is to give the characters respite from their quest, while the function of the green world is to bring about resolution. The Elvish

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[31] Frye, 1957, p. 183

[32] Frye, 1957, p. 183

[33] Frye, 1957, p. 183-4

homes are the clearest indications of separate space, but even Elves themselves seem to carry around an aspect of this green world; wherever the Elves are found in groups, so too is a heightened sense of nature, a more mysterious and beautiful world, and some respite from the dangers of the world.

This difference in purpose reflects a key characteristic of the Elves. They live to preserve, not to change. Where the fairies in Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, for instance, work to alter the state of relationships between the four main characters and thus "put right" a perceived wrong, the Elves in *The Lord of the Rings* are reluctant to bring about change of any kind, hoping instead to hold onto the past. They participate in the destruction of the Ring as the lesser of two evils, because there is no alternative, not because they would willingly change the world in which they live. Galadriel is well aware of what the quest to destroy the Ring will bring, as evidenced by her reaction when Frodo offers the Ring to her: she knows that accepting it would corrupt her, just as *not* destroying it would corrupt the whole of Middle-earth; she also knows that by allowing it to be destroyed, she is surrendering the last hold she and her kind have on Middle-earth, and without their ability to keep the past in the present, the Elves will fade and disappear into the West, returning to Valinor.

The reason that the Elves dislike change is largely that they have such long lives: they have an idealised sense of the past, and they would like the world to stay the way it was. Of course, their past is not perfect; this idealised past is

illusory to an extent, but they were at one time a more powerful presence on Middle-earth. They also have to deal with a great deal of grief: they love the world, but because they live forever, everything that they love eventually dies. The Elves' longevity thus gives them a curious relationship to time: they continually long for the past even as they progress into the future. Verlyn Flieger says that because they are always facing their past, they are "backed into the future by those who follow. Men are *pro*ceeding into the future, while Elves are *re*ceding into it".[34] The Elves want to arrest time, or at least preserve as much of the past as they can, which leads to the creation of Secondary Worlds like Rivendell, where people tell stories and remember the past, and Lórien, where the past is alive.

This timelessness, however, is not necessarily good. Timelessness in the sense that Tolkien uses it means a reluctance to embrace change, which leads to stagnation of society. The contrast between the deathlessness of the Elves and the humans' ability to die, which leads to differing attitudes to change, is one of the key themes of the book. For Tolkien, deathlessness was not something to strive toward. Instead, he introduced the idea of the "Gift of Iluvatar": men can die, where Elves cannot. This was an analogy for his real-world beliefs: although there can be no certainty of what comes after death, Christianity provides the hope of eternal life – true eternal life, rather than mere longevity – so it is better to have faith and avoid fighting death than to cling to the world and avoid change. This relates directly to Tolkien's idea of "consolation", joy found in a happy ending, which will be discussed later.

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[34] Flieger, 1997, p. 70

The different flow of time in the Elvish worlds, which is brought about by Elvish reluctance to face change and embrace the future, contributes to the trouble experienced by the characters trying to describe them. Many of the main characters in the book comment on how time in Lórien and Rivendell seems to move more slowly, as discussed in detail in Chapter 2, "Time and Escape". This unreal feeling in Elvish space, combined with the hyper-realism of their surroundings, makes the experience of being in these places dreamlike. This feeling is reinforced by the spatial separation caused by making these places so hard to find and enter and by the trepidation shown by supporting characters when discussing the Elves. One could thus say that the Elves create a world in which their own rules take the place of those of nature. Richard Purtill says:

> The Elves are akin to the scientist in that they love the beauty of the world and seek to understand it, akin to the artist in that they are 'sub-creators', embellishing the world with what mortals call magic but which Tolkien hints is a sort of fiction, in fact, a sort of fiction rather like that which Tolkien himself produces.[35]

They are sub-creators themselves in a world already created by a sub-creator. Purtill calls their embellishment a fiction because they try to slow the passage of time, creating homes that are beautiful to look at but are also unapproachable and static. Their worlds are not *real* in the sense of having vitality because they never change, and they never change because the Elves do not want them to.

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[35] Purtill, 1984, p. 101

As several of the Elves point out, they grieve for things that pass away, and eventually, because they live forever, everything passes away. This gives them what Tolkien called "the heart-racking sense of the vanished past",[36] which makes them reluctant to embrace change and, in fact, causes them to wish that time would stand still. This desire is what causes the skewed time in the Elvish spaces in the books: the Elves do have some influence over their surroundings, especially Elrond and Galadriel, who each possess one of the Three Rings untouched by Sauron, and so can make this desire manifest in a small way. Theirs is not an entirely negative mindset, though, because this desire to stop time and their connection with the world enable them to do for the characters of the book what Tolkien wants his book to do for his readers: enable recovery, escape, and, as mentioned earlier, consolation. The separation in space caused by their reluctance to change means that their Secondary Worlds are sharply defined as different and special, which encourages recovery; the differences in time create a world without hurry, which encourages escape; and the difference between the Elvish and the mortal lifespan is highlighted to offer the reader consolation.

Recovery and Escape

The Secondary Worlds of the Elves, even more than Middle-earth as a whole, encourage recovery. Garbowski mentions that Tolkien wants to "evoke the miracle of the ordinary"[37] in *The Lord of the Rings*: he wants to do exactly what he says fairy stories should do. In his essay *On Fairy-Stories*, Tolkien

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[36] Tolkien in Purtill, 1984, p. 13

[37] Garbowski, 2004, p. 140

worries that people could become world-weary, ceasing to find wonder in the kinds of things that would have evoked astonishment in children. He says that people should become child-like (rather than childish) again by seeing things in a fresh way. "We should look at green again, and be startled anew (but not blinded) by blue and yellow and red... Recovery... is a re-gaining—regaining of a clear view".[38] Tolkien structures his fairy story in such a way as to attempt to encourage this recovery in his readers. "*Faërie*," he says, "contains many things besides elves and fays, and besides dwarfs, witches, trolls, giants, or dragons: it holds the seas, the sun, the moon, the sky; and the earth, and all things that are in it".[39] In other words, it may well contain fantastic things, but it also contains everyday things that, with any luck and with enough skill on the part of the author, can be seen anew because of their proximity to the fantastic.

This kind of appreciation of the ordinary is one of the characteristics of his Secondary World, and in Middle-earth, that appreciation is nowhere more obvious than in Lothlórien, where "shapes [seem] at once clearer and freshly conceived, and indescribably ancient, tangential to eternity".[40] Tolkien seems to demonstrate the process of recovery whenever his characters enter Elvish space: they see everyday things such as trees, rivers, even, particularly in the encounter with Gildor, food like bread and fruit in new ways. The most obvious example occurs when Frodo enters Lórien. The colours he sees are fresh and moving even though he knows them well, and everything is perfect: "No

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[38] Tolkien, 1964, p. 51-2

[39] Tolkien, 1964, p. 15

[40] Garbowski, 2004, p. 141

blemish or sickness or deformity could be seen in anything that grew upon the earth".[41] He has recovered – regained – the wonder at the world that he felt as a child, enacting the recovery that Tolkien insists is one of the key functions of fairy stories. The absence of any blemish in Lórien is actually not a good thing because it means that the world is completely lacking in anything to challenge the beings that live there; nevertheless, Frodo's recovery is used to demonstrate to the readers how they should see this new world. The places in which the Elves live reinforce this: they do seem to create a separate space for themselves in which the "beauty of the world" is much more clearly described than most other places in the book. Their world *must* be carefully cut off from the rest of Middle-earth because without that clear difference, the recovery would be less striking, and the reader would be less able to partake of it.

Something similar occurs with the Elvish attitude to time and Tolkien's idea of Escape. Tolkien's dislike of the common understanding of the idea of escapism is made clear in *On Fairy-stories*. He believes that escape is to be encouraged, that people sometimes need to escape from the horrors of everyday life.[42] As pointed out earlier, the characters in the book can escape briefly when they go to Elvish places such as Lórien or Rivendell; this reflects Tolkien's desire to help the reader escape the problems of modern life, just for a while. Because the Elves can slow time, the characters are more able to relax in those spaces, heightening the impact of that escape. Like recovery,

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[41] *FotR*, p. 461

[42] Tolkien, 1964

the escape demonstrated by Tolkien would have less impact if the Elves were not so set on avoiding change that they somehow manage to slow down the time that surrounds them – or at least make it seem that way. Tolkien also uses the Elves to help him demonstrate the most important of his three functions of fairy stories, consolation.

Consolation and Eucatastrophe

In fantasy stories, Tolkien refers to the "turn"[43] – the moment when, essentially, good triumphs over evil despite the odds. This he calls "consolation". The happy ending is the most important part of fairy stories – "fairy stories" in Tolkien's view meaning fantasy, myth, and fairy tales. "Tragedy is the true form of Drama," according to Tolkien, "but the opposite is true of Fairy-story. Since we do not appear to possess a word that expresses this opposite – I will call it *Eucatastrophe.* The *eucatastrophic* tale is the true form of fairy-tale, and its highest function".[44] Instead of having an unhappy ending that creates pleasure through catharsis, as tragedies do, fairy stories create pleasure through exactly the opposite: denial of tragic endings. In order to work properly and to create pleasure, the fairy tale has to acknowledge the existence and possibility of dyscatastrophe, of sorrow and failure; Tolkien says:

> [T]he possibility of these is necessary to the joy of deliverance; it denies... universal final defeat and in so far is *evangelium*, giving a fleeting glimpse of Joy, Joy beyond the walls of the world, poignant as grief.[45]

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[43] Tolkien, 1964

[44] Tolkien, 1964, p. 60

[45] Tolkien, 1964, p. 60

This kind of eucatastrophe is demonstrated when, in *The Lord of the Rings*, Frodo and several other characters not only survive the events of the book, but also are allowed to travel with the Elves over the sea to Valinor and eternal life. In this way, the Elvish Secondary World of Valinor is used to enable consolation.

There is another level of eucatastrophe, though. According to Tolkien, the Gospel in which Christ rises from the dead is the ultimate kind of fairy story, a story "which embraces all the essence of fairy-stories".[46] Christianity has a story that acknowledges the possibility of failure and definitely allows for sorrow when it brings in the story of Christ on the cross. Tolkien accepted Christian mythology as historical fact, writing in a letter to C.S. Lewis that "the story of Christ is a true myth... but with this tremendous difference: that it *really happened*".[47] This means that the sorrow created by this potential disaster is the embodiment of dyscatastrophe. Then, of course, Christ rises from the grave and redeems the sins of man. Because, again, Tolkien accepted this as fact, this event becomes the embodiment of eucatastrophe, causing all the more pleasure because of the awareness of the possibility of disaster. He said that "The Birth of Christ is the eucatastrophe of Man's history. The Resurrection is the eucatastrophe of the story of Incarnation. This story begins and ends in joy".[48] Because Tolkien views the Gospel as describing a real event, he sees Christianity as the epitome of eucatastrophe: it is most satisfying because it literally replaces death with true immortal life.

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[46] Tolkien, 1964, p. 62

[47] Tolkien in Schakel, 2005, p. 35

[48] Tolkien, 1964, 62-3

He shows this kind of consolation in the appendices when Aragorn dies, but it is heavily implied that he will live on after death.[49] Here, the Elves are used as a point of comparison; they are not used to demonstrate this kind of consolation because they cannot die and thus cannot partake of this immortal life. They can, however, illustrate the other kind of immortality: they live until the world ends, and then they end as well. Their Secondary Worlds are used to show the negative side of this kind of immortality, which is then held up against the immortal life granted to humans after death.

In using the Elves and Aragorn as examples of the two kinds of eucatastrophe, the Elves as a demonstration of the in-story type in which characters escape death and Aragorn as a manifestation of the Great Eucatastrophe applicable to all mortals who have faith in an afterlife, Tolkien demonstrates one of his theories in *On Fairy-Stories*. He uses the eucatastrophe found in the consolation of his happy endings to remind the readers about the greater eucatastrophe awaiting them at the end of their lives. Fantasy writing should be encouraged, according to him, because when done well, when it has a happy ending that is convincing and does not deny the possibility of an *unhappy* ending, it gives an echo of the joy felt by humans with the realisation of the "underlying reality or truth"[50] of the defining moment in Christian mythology. As R.J. Reilly puts it, "This is the justification of the fairy story... that it gives us in small, in the beat of the heart and the catch of

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[49] *The Return of the King*, Appendix A

[50] Tolkien, 1964, p. 62

the breath, the joy of the infinite good news".[51] Sub-creation in fairy stories, or any kind of story with a happy ending, allows a eucatastrophe that reflects the elation caused by the "Great Eucatastrophe" in real life – a kind of homage to the Creator.

Each aspect of Tolkien's deliberate alienation of the Elves – spatial separation, differences in attitudes to time, and the death/deathlessness dichotomy – correspond to one facet of Tolkien's threefold function of fairy stories: recovery, escape, and consolation respectively. Chapter 1, "Space and Recovery", will deal with the relationship of space and the boundaries between Elvish space and other space in Middle-earth and how this helps Tolkien to bring about recovery in both the reader and the characters. Chapter 2 examines differences between Elvish and mortal time, which reinforce the spatial boundaries and allow the reader a level of escape from everyday life. Finally, Chapter 3, "Death and Consolation", discusses how the Elvish lifespan and attitude to death differs from that of the mortals and how this allows Tolkien to make a point about the afterlife and offer a form of consolation.

[51] Reilly, 2004, p. 103

CHAPTER ONE: SPACE AND RECOVERY

Boundaries

Elvish spaces are removed from those of the other beings in Middle-earth, existing in worlds of their own that are clearly demarcated and described with such wonder that they seem to have little to do with the rest of Middle-earth. These spaces are isolated with clearly distinguished boundaries, both physical and otherwise. The physical boundaries are clear: Elvish space is difficult to reach, often surrounded by forests or mountains, and usually reachable only by a path beset by peril. Other boundaries are less easy to identify. The sea is one: it acts as a physical boundary between Middle-earth and Valinor, the place to which all the Elves will eventually return. It also stands as a symbol of ultimate separation in that it represents the pull to and promise of Valinor, continually drawing the Elves away from Middle-earth. The Elvish affinity with what is natural in their surroundings, particularly trees, also acts as a symbolic boundary because, similar to the hobbits and the Shire, they withdraw into these surroundings, preferring not to venture out. The difference between the Elves and the hobbits, as will be discussed later in this chapter, is in their relationship to the nature that surrounds them: the hobbits have a "close friendship with the earth",[52] while the Elves have a more possessive relationship and wield some control over nature.[53]

One of the most important of the non-physical boundaries, as discussed in Chapter 2, is the immortality of the Elves: because they live so long, they

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[52] *FotR*, p. 2

[53] Tiffin, 1995

begin to long for the past. This longing results in the Elves attempting to recapture or hold on to the past, which, coupled with the fact that an immortal species would not count the years in the same way as mortals anyway, leads to an unusual relationship with time and a kind of mental and cultural separation from the other races. Because Elves see time in such a different way, they have a fundamentally different approach to life, making it difficult for other races really to identify with and understand them. The combination of all of these boundaries means that Elvish lands are almost completely separate from Middle-earth as a whole, a Secondary World within the Secondary World of Middle-earth, allowing Tolkien to use them to encourage his concept of Recovery more emphatically than in the rest of his book.

Barriers and Borders

Throughout *The Lord of the Rings*, Elves are constantly associated with water and with the sea. Christopher Clausen notes, "Memory of the sea and of their homeland beyond it is one of the defining characteristics of Tolkien's Elves".[54] All the Elves in Middle-earth will cross the sea – which Tolkien tends to capitalise to emphasise its importance – and the Sea thus stands as a barrier of the highest order between Middle-Earth and Valinor and therefore, because the Elves are destined to return to Valinor, between the other races and the Elves. No matter how close a human might stand to an Elf, that distance, the whole distance of the Sea, is always symbolically between them. The association with the Sea is introduced early in the book, when Frodo, Sam and Pippin encounter Elves for the first time, and that association is

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[54] Clausen, 1974, p. 12

progressively strengthened with each subsequent meeting. The Elves' longing for the sea is a deep part of their character, as shown when Frodo stands in Lórien, "hearing far off great seas upon beaches that had long ago been washed away, and sea-birds crying whose race had perished from the earth".[55] That he hears the sound of the Sea – capitalised because of its importance to the Elves – is not accidental. The sounds in the wood are reflecting the greatest pull that Elves feel: the longing for the Sea and the yearning to return to Valinor. The song that Galadriel sings to the Company is filled with references to and desire for the Sea and for Valinor that lies beyond.

Only when Galadriel sends her message to Legolas, however, does the reader realise that this Sea-longing could have a negative effect. "Beware of the Sea!" she warns him. "If thou hearest the cry of the gull on the shore, / Thy heart shall then rest in the forest no more".[56] Sure enough, the sound of the gulls awakens a powerful longing in Legolas that detracts from the joy he feels in everyday life: "Gulls!" he says to his friends:

> They are flying far inland. A wonder they are to me and a trouble to my heart. Never in all my life had I met them, until we came to Pelargir, and there I heard them crying in the air as we rode to the battle of the ships. Then I stood still, forgetting war in Middle-earth; for their wailing voices spoke to me of the Sea. The Sea! Alas! I have not yet beheld it. But deep in the hearts of all my kindred lies the sea-longing, which it is perilous to stir. Alas! for the gulls. No peace shall I have again under beech or under elm.[57]

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[55] *FotR*, p. 460

[56] *TTT*, p. 130

[57] *RotK*, p. 164

In fact, Legolas spends much of *The Return of the King* pining after the Sea at inopportune moments. Legolas and Galadriel both speak of the sea-longing in ominous tones, and indeed, it almost immediately begins to draw Legolas away from his friends, as Gimli and Merry feel the need to ask him to stay. The idea of the Sea, then, acts as a constant reminder of the divide between Elves and men (and others), typified by the actual divide between Valinor and Middle-earth.

The ultimate Elvish space, Valinor, is thus most clearly set apart, with the Sea and the Evernight acting as barriers between those lands and Middle-earth, but places such as Rivendell and Lórien have barriers and borders as well, daunting ones, if not as effective as complete separation. The Elves have withdrawn from interactions with others to the point where they are little more than memories and occasional half-glimpsed figures for hobbits and rumours of peril for humans like Boromir. In fact, they are associated so closely with their habitats that it seems they have become part of them, particularly in Lórien. Honegger says that the Lórien Elves have lived there so long that they have begun to influence the trees, and, importantly, "the influence has been mutual. The Elves of Lothlórien call themselves 'Galadhrim', i.e. 'tree-people'".[58] They define themselves in terms of their homes, much like hobbits in the Shire, but unlike hobbits, they have a degree of control over their environments that enables them to remove Lórien's beauty from Middle-earth, heightening it and perfecting it rather than accepting it as it is.

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[58] Honegger, 2004, p. 75

Other beings in the book certainly are close to nature, which is a central theme of the book. Aragorn, for example, defines himself in terms of his ability to protect people from the wild, but he protects them from the ordinary wild; he does not control it. The ecological place of a Ranger differs from that of other humans (and hobbits), which according to Jessica Tiffin, is "seen to be the controlled and limited world of agricultural reality, effectively a fruitful co-existence with nature in its tamed state".[59] The Elves, on the other hand, can control their environment to some extent, not least because of the Three Rings. They can keep fair things from fading and thus deny the natural order of things. This ultimately leads to a kind of possessive relationship with nature: they can control it, so, to a degree, they own the worlds that they have created. The influence between the Elves and the trees of Lórien is mutual: the Elves *change* their surroundings to fit what they desire rather than allowing nature to follow its course.

The Elves, then, are a part of their home, and their home is a part of them. The hobbits are not part of the Shire in the same way. Although they see the Shire as entirely theirs, as much a part of their identity as the woods are part of the Elves', Tolkien undermines this idea throughout his book.[60] Simon Malpas notes that while the Shire is initially presented as "a foundational space, an ontological ground for the Hobbit's identity",[61] Frodo and the reader are reminded repeatedly that the Shire has a historical context that has nothing to do with hobbits. Near the beginning of the book, Gildor tells Frodo

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[59] Tiffin, 1995, p. 24

[60] Malpas, 2006

[61] Malpas, 2006, p. 96

that "it is not [his] own Shire... Others dwelt here before hobbits were; and others will dwell here again when hobbits are no more".[62] While the hobbits identify themselves in terms of the Shire, Tolkien makes it clear that the Shire is an ordinary, though beautiful, place.

Elves, on the other hand, have been in the world almost since it began. Their lands, despite the fading of the Elves, remain very much *their* lands, and carry with them an element of the magical. Nature in the rest of the book is presented in an everyday manner. Nature in Elvish spaces is presented as special, magical, full of heightened beauty, though it is an unchanging kind of beauty. Unlike with the hobbits, Tolkien does not undermine the Elves' connection to their homelands – at least not until the Ring is destroyed and the Elves must leave their realms. He has created a race that is so in tune with its surroundings that they are almost the same thing. Tolkien says that the Elves are "far more natural" than man[63] because the Elves are "bound to the circles of the world"[64] until it ends: they cannot die and leave the world, so they are part of it. The repeated parallels between Elves and the natural world surrounding them indicate that Elves are not only part of the world but are also part of nature. The connection to nature is clearest in the Elvish homelands, which tend to be found in forests: Mirkwood, Rivendell, Lórien.

This connection and distance from others are not only found in the specific dwelling places of the Elves, however, though they are strongest there. The

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[62] *FotR*, p. 111

[63] Tolkien, 1964, p. 12

[64] Purtill, 1984, p. 101

first actual encounter with Elves takes place when Frodo, Sam, and Pippin encounter a group of them while on the road to Bree. During this encounter, the Elves – Gildor and his group – are described in terms that separate them from the hobbits and indicate an unusual relationship with nature. Even before the hobbits see them, this relationship is obvious. The song they sing is filled with images of nature, of the world: they refer repeatedly to the sea as well as to trees, blossoms, and, particularly, stars and starlight. They even relate the stars to flowers: the stars are "sown in windy fields" and are now "silver blossoms". Overall, the focus is on stars more than anything else. This emphasis on starlight reflects *The Silmarillion*, in which the Elves came into being under the stars, while Men came into being in the sunlight. Debbie Sly notes that starlight defines the nature of the Elves, named "People of the Stars" by the Valar,[65] as opposed to the other races in Middle-earth. This is yet another way of marking the differences between Elves and Men (and hobbits): Elves walk comfortably in the starlight, the light into which they were born, while Men and hobbits prefer the day.

Even before they are seen, then, the Elves establish themselves as having a different relationship to the world than the hobbits and thus separate themselves on a mental, if not a physical, level. The kind of familiar strangeness introduced with the Elves is reinforced by the language the Elves use: they sing a song in a language that the hobbits do not speak, apart from Frodo, and even he speaks only a little. Even so, they all understand a degree of the song: "Yet the sound blending with the melody seemed to shape itself

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[65] Sly, 2000

in their thought into words which they only partly understood".[66] That they can understand the gist of the song without understanding the words themselves is an indication that the world they are now in is their own and yet changed, as though they have wandered into a Secondary World merely by entering the presence of Elves. They are still surrounded by their own world, the world of the Shire, but it is suddenly presented as *different*, magical in that they can understand when they should not be able to. It is also beautiful – when the Elves arrive, more attention is paid to the woods and the beauty inherent in them, among other things – and dangerous, fraught with peril from the Black Riders, which the hobbits do not yet understand and which the Elves make all the more frightening by alluding to them without explaining them. It seems that they have entered Faërie as described by Tolkien.

The Elves creating a kind of Secondary World is not the end of the emphasis on their difference in this first encounter. The three mentions of the sea also act as a reminder of the final, inevitable physical separation between Elves and others, which Gildor quickly reinforces. When he offers to let the hobbits accompany him, he says, "It is not our custom, but for this time we will take you on our road".[67] First, he reminds the reader that Elves allowing other races to travel with them is unusual. Then, he says that they will be travelling on "our road", meaning not only that the hobbits will be journeying with the Elves but that they will be moving in Elvish space, on an Elvish path,

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[66] *FotR*, p. 105

[67] *FotR*, p. 107

indicating that even within the Shire, the Elves have spaces into which other beings cannot easily enter.

The description of that path is once again filled with nature imagery: trees, hills, grass, and the ever-present stars. In fact, the "hall" where they stop for the night is composed of trees. The clearing in which the hall is found has clearly delineated borders: heavy woods on three sides and a sharp incline on the fourth – and it is a natural hall, formed by the boughs of trees overhead. Once again, the implication is that Elves have a different relationship with nature than other races, one in which nature seems to move to accommodate them, creating a natural hall that, until the Elves draw attention to it, has not even been hinted at. The Elves seem to be able to manipulate nature to create different spaces, Secondary Worlds, for themselves. At the very least, the Secondary World that the hobbits appear to enter when they meet Gildor is described much more in terms of trees, stars, and nature in general than is the rest of Middle-earth and is offset by natural boundaries.

These physical borders are more tangible in Rivendell, which is a triangle bordered on two sides by the Hoarwell and Loudwater rivers and on the third by the nearby Misty Mountains. The nature imagery, marking a separation in mindset – even spirit, one might say – abounds once again, with references to gardens, valleys, and mountains. The valley and mountains give the impression of a place cut off, isolated. Gandalf backs up the idea of Rivendell as a space *apart* from Middle-earth when he says, "We are sitting in a

fortress. Outside it is getting dark".[68] "Outside", obviously, marks Rivendell as "inside", creating an "us/them" dichotomy. Elrond's control over the river bordering his land is established immediately when Gandalf explains how the Elf created a flood to wash away the Nazgul. One of the biggest borders around Rivendell, then, is under the full control of its ruler, making it all the more formidable a barrier, and the mentions of water remind the reader of the connection between the Elves and the sea. Rivendell is also named "the Last Homely House east of the Sea",[69] and the sea is mentioned repeatedly. In Rivendell, most of the description involves colour – mostly shining white, grey and silver, colours associated with light and starlight – and water and stars. Even Glorfindel's horse is linked to stars: "In the dusk its headstall flickered and flashed, as if it were studded with gems like living stars".[70] Overall, then, Tolkien clearly establishes Rivendell as a place of difference, and one of majesty.

Rivendell, however, is possibly the most accessible of the Elvish spaces. Part of this could be due to its status of home of the "half-elven". Elrond, as a descendant of Eärendil, has the option of choosing Elvish immortality or human mortality, as do his descendents; he is thus part of both Elvish and mortal space, meaning that his dwelling-place is not wholly alien to its visitors. Rivendell is open to travel, and when Frodo arrives there, he meets Dwarves and humans and even Bilbo the Hobbit as well as Elves. This multicultural approach means that there are beings present with whom the protagonists

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[68] *FotR*, p. 296

[69] *FotR*, p. 295

[70] *FotR*, p. 275

can identify more easily than with Elves, which reduces much of the strangeness and difference of Rivendell. Frodo demonstrates this when he has a lengthy conversation with the dwarf Glóin and then later with Bilbo rather than interacting with any of the Elves during the feast after he wakes up. While Rivendell is different from the spaces to which Frodo is accustomed, it is approachable, more in tune with the world around it than Lórien. This means that it is less clearly defined as a Secondary World, though the aspects of separation and difference remain: it is permeable, in a way, which means that escape, consolation, and recovery are less striking than they are in Lórien.

Like Rivendell, Lórien is bordered by mountains, and the centre of it, where Galadriel dwells, is protected by a river. In this case, Aragorn and Legolas comment on the beauty of the place before the reader even has the chance to enter it. Here, like in Rivendell, water is a prominent image, and throughout the Company's stay in Lórien, references to trees, stars, and water are much more frequent than in descriptions of other places in the book. Sam says of the Lórien Elves, "they seem to belong here, more even than hobbits do in the Shire. Whether they've made the land, or the land's made them, it's hard to say".[71] The end result is that the Lórien Elves are immediately and inextricably intertwined with the trees that surround them. While up to this point, the Elves have been established as relating to nature in a different way from hobbits, men, and dwarves, only with the Lórien Elves does Tolkien enhance this difference to the point where the Elves seem to have more in common with

[71] *FotR*, p. 473

the trees than with the other humanoid species. He makes it quite clear that the inhabitants of Lórien are almost completely separate from those in other places in the book, as is Lórien itself, making Lórien the Secondary World that is the most defined as apart from Middle-earth.

Much more so than other Elves in the book, as already intimated, these are closely bound to their environment: J.S. Ryan points out that in the case of the Elves, "the imagined being has his inside on the outside, his is a visible soul".[72] The soul of the Elves is closely entangled with their forest, so that, as J.C. Dufau says, "The [Elves in Lórien] could be said to inhabit their trees as a soul does its body – intimately and powerfully".[73] Dufau argues that each race in *The Lord of the Rings* has a particular place in which that race would be most comfortable, so that the hobbits, for instance, "belong" to the Shire, and the people of Rohan "belong" to the plains. Nowhere is that more obvious than in Lórien. The forest is important to the Elves, but the reverse is also true; as Honegger explains, "the forest seems to have taken on more and more 'Elvish' qualities during the millennia of its existence'".[74] The Elves are so close to their environment that they have mutually influenced each other.

The Elves also have cloaks, like the ones that they give to the Fellowship, that effectively blend them into their surroundings, making them visually a part of their habitat. Similarly, their city is indistinguishable from forest: "Frodo looked and saw, still at some distance, a hill of many mighty trees, or a city of green

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[72] Ryan, 1966, p. 47

[73] Dufau, 2005, p. 108

[74] Honegger, 2004, p. 75

towers: which it was he could not tell".[75] The Elves here *belong* to Lórien in a deeper way than the Hobbits belong in the Shire; the reader could picture Hobbits in other locations, such as Bree, but it is much more difficult to picture the Lórien Elves living anywhere other than Lórien. Even Valinor, which is the true home of all Elves, will not be quite good enough for those in Lórien; Haldir says, "It would be a poor life in a land where no mallorn grew. But if there are mallorn-trees beyond the Great Sea, none have reported it".[76] Even in the land to which all the Elves must go, Haldir and his kin will not be satisfied without the kind of nature to which he has become accustomed.

This affinity for nature runs deeper than that of any other Elves encountered in *The Lord of the Rings* and effectively separates these Elves not only from the other races of Middle-earth, but also from other members of their own race. By combining the closeness to nature with the clear boundaries encountered in each Elvish space, as he does in other areas, and then making it that much more powerful, Tolkien is able to make the Secondary World of Lórien the clearest in the book and the one that conforms the most to his idea of "the realm of faërie" as both beautiful and dangerous. Rivendell is beautiful, but the only sense of danger felt by the main characters is related to the external threat due to Sauron. This is not the case with Lórien, which, unlike Rivendell, is closed to travel, separated to the point where outsiders are suspicious of the land. Boromir calls it a "perilous land" and says that "few come out who

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[75] *FotR*, p. 461

[76] *FotR*, p. 457

once go in; and of that few none have escaped unscathed".[77] Honegger notes:

> Lothlórien... is not the paradisiacal Mallorn-grove for everybody. The Rohirrim refer to it by the not very flattering name "Dwimordene", which can be translated as "Vale of Illusion". For them, it is a place only vaguely known from hearsay, associated with magic and wizardry and... held in superstitious awe.[78]

In *On Fairy-Stories*, Tolkien says repeatedly that Faërie is perilous as well as beautiful, and the description encountered before the reader even reaches Lórien implies both of those aspects. For the characters in Middle-earth, at least, it seems that Lórien is indeed a Secondary World in the classic Tolkienian sense: lovely, but dangerous. Tolkien initially alerts the reader to the possible jeopardy in Lórien, even though he later makes it clear that "only evil need fear it, or those who bring some evil with them".[79]

Upon the Company's initial meeting with Haldir and his friends, the reader might be excused for thinking that the fear and superstition surrounding Lórien has some basis in fact. The difference in attitude between the Lothlórien Elves and the Rivendell Elves is apparent the moment the Company encounters them. The first word spoken is the harsh command "daro" ("descend") when Legolas starts to climb a tree. The implication is that the Fellowship has been caught trespassing where they do not belong, and the intimidating nature of this first encounter is driven home when Legolas reacts in "surprise and fear", thus implying that there is something of which to be afraid. This shows that Lórien is alien even to the Elf to whom the Company and the reader have

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[77] *FotR*, p. 443

[78] Honegger, 2004, p. 62

[79] *FotR*, p. 443

become accustomed and to whom, as a symbol of the Elven Secondary World due to his difference from the rest of the party, they doubtless look for an example of how to respond to this situation. While the feeling of overt hostility is quickly dispelled, the feeling of *difference*, of deliberate alienation, is reinforced. These Elves speak a language different from their Silvan kindred, and Haldir is the only one of the three who speaks the Common Language because the Lórien Elves "do not willingly have dealings with any other folk. Even [their] own kindred in the North are sundered from [them]".[80] That these Elves do not willingly allow strangers in their land is referred to repeatedly, though the only member of the Company to whom they react with overt hostility is Gimli the Dwarf. Despite the fact that Lothlórien offers respite to the weary travellers, they are continually reminded of their status as outsiders.

Even the way time moves in Lórien creates a barrier, evidenced in the conversation Sam starts on leaving Lórien. He complains that his count of time is off, and says, "Anyone would think time did not count in there!" As Flieger points out, the phrase "in there" "seems at first like a throwaway, just what anyone would say about a place in the woods. But it immediately establishes a contrast with an implied 'out here' and has the effect of setting Lórien off from the rest of the world".[81] In an elucidation of his complaint about time not counting, Sam claims that time does not seem to work in the same way in Lórien. In fact, the idea of time being something that is almost entirely flexible in the space of Faërie is one that, as Tolkien mentions, is prevalent in

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[80] *FotR*, p. 449

[81] Flieger, 1997, p. 90

fairy stories; he calls this "Other Time", which will be discussed in Chapter 2. That entering Lórien is equivalent to entering Other Time is further confirmation that Tolkien intended this to be a Secondary World within a Secondary World, one that he can use to drive home his ideas about the need for fairy stories to enable recovery, escape, and consolation.

Secondary Worlds and Green Worlds

While Tolkien initially presents Lórien as dangerous, certainly deadly for the wrong people (or orcs), the tone of his descriptions quickly changes. After the first encounter, the Elves are described with a sense of wonder, and their pride in and love of their home is obvious. The Elves' devotion to Lórien seems to bleed through into the descriptions of the Golden Wood. Although Haldir speaks repeatedly of how much he loves Lothlórien, the reader only really understands why by looking through Frodo's eyes: when his blindfold is removed, he is so surprised by the beauty of the woods that he actually catches his breath. Throughout *On Fairy-Stories*, Tolkien returns to the idea of the *desirability* of the worlds described in fantasy, and before long, he starts to describe Lórien's beauty with this same feeling of desire, of wistfulness, although, as will be discussed later, these descriptions are not entirely without reserve. Lórien's beauty changes little, and the civilisation that lives there is static – but it is still beautiful.

As *The Fellowship of the Ring* progresses, the Elves are described as more and more mysterious, in tune with nature, and separate from those around them. These spatial boundaries and closeness to nature feature prominently

in Tolkien's definition of the Secondary World and are also key characteristics of Frye's green world. Frye's description of the green world, as previously mentioned, involves a mysterious female figure/fertility goddess, the triumph of summer over winter, and the green world as a "world of desire". Rivendell and Lórien both contain mysterious female figures—Arwen and Galadriel. Lórien is the most mysterious and Elvish place in the book, so it makes sense that Lórien has the most mysterious and "magical" female figure. Galadriel, as a holder of one of the Three Rings, certainly has ties to the earth that are stronger than almost any other figure in the book. When the Fellowship arrives in Lórien and Frodo is overcome by the beauty and hyper-realness of his surroundings, Haldir says that what he is feeling is "the power of the Lady of the Galadhrim".[82] Galadriel's power over her Ring enables her to control certain elements of her habitat, bending it to her will.

Galadriel is powerful, then, but not wholly intimidating. Purtill points out that "Galadriel... is the only Elvish character to show great mastery of what non-Elves would call 'magic'... At the same time, Galadriel exhibits traditional 'feminine' characteristics: gentleness, understanding of personal relationships, compassion".[83] She is deeply feminine and at the same time deeply strange and thoroughly intertwined with the wellbeing of Lórien. "Tolkien pictures Galadriel's temptation as the temptation to be universally, irresistibly, loved. Her metaphors for her own beauty are all taken from nature. The light the ring

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[82] *FotR*, p. 461

[83] Purtill, 1984, p. 113

sheds is *only* on her, 'leaving all else in darkness'".[84] This means that, for Lórien, Galadriel is the equivalent of a fertility goddess. She wants to be loved as a god is loved, though she is able to avoid that temptation; she keeps her realm fresh and green and, more than bringing about the rebirth of summer, keeps it from ever really leaving.

The Elvish places, particularly Lórien, do indeed represent a "world of desire", as Frye put it. In fact, the descriptions of Lórien are what cement the idea of the Elves that live there as noble creatures. They are related so closely to their dwelling place that any awe of Lórien is automatically translated into awe of the Elves that live there. In making the Elves figures of mystical beauty, beings to be beheld with awe along with their surroundings, Tolkien is ensuring that the Secondary World he has created is one in which the beauty outweighs fear felt by the reader due to the dangers inherent in Faërie. Those fears still exist, but the beauty is made all the stronger because it is alien, slightly other. The clear boundaries between Elves and Elvish spaces and the rest of Middle-earth help to make these Secondary Worlds and their inhabitants, Lórien in particular, so obviously different from the rest of the places in the book that they almost seem to be entirely different worlds. Entering these worlds has a particular effect upon the characters and, indeed, upon the reader. While the function of the green world is to allow characters to resolve problems, one of the functions of the Secondary World is to enable recovery, both for the characters and for the reader.

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[84] Purtill, 1984, p. 115

As already noted, Tolkien asserts that recovery—or rather, Recovery—is one of the three main purposes of fantasy stories. Put simply, recovery occurs when, in contemplating the fantastic, we see the Primary World anew. It refers to a recovery of a child-like view of the world, a sense of wonder in the ordinary and a reconnection to what Elizabeth Kirk calls "experiences so communal and basic that the individual loses contact with them as he becomes more sophisticated".[85] In other words, people have certain concepts that they believe they understand fully; fantasy can set those concepts free, causing someone to look at them again. This is done by placing the ordinary in close proximity to the extraordinary. Tolkien says that "[w]e should meet the centaur and the dragon, and then perhaps suddenly behold, like the ancient shepherds, sheep, and dogs, and horses".[86] Fairy stories remind people that what they have become accustomed to is no less marvellous for being seen every day; "simplicities are made all the more luminous by their setting.[87] The familiar does not have to be dull, should not be dull.

More than this, seeing things anew in this way should prevent what Tolkien calls possessiveness: "the things that are trite, or (in a bad sense) familiar, are the things that we have appropriated... we laid hands on them, and then locked them in our hoard, acquired them, and acquiring ceased to look at them".[88] When we think that we know everyday items, we take them for

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[85] Kirk, 1971, p. 10

[86] Tolkien, 1964, p. 51

[87] Tolkien, 1964, p. 53

[88] Tolkien, 1964, p. 52

granted, ceasing to appreciate them in the way that they should be appreciated – wasting them, in essence. To believe that we really know the essence of something is to attempt to chain it down, lock it where we think it belongs and ignore it instead of seeing it for what it is. The fear surrounding Faërie could actually aid here: something regarded with a degree of fear because of its alien nature could be less likely to be taken for granted, prompting the reader to appreciate it all the more.

The people best suited to aid in the recovery of the reader are those that are capable of describing the world with the kind of wonder that they want to pass on to the reader. In *On Fairy Stories*, Tolkien says that "Fantasy is made out of the Primary World, but a good craftsman loves his material, and has a knowledge and feeling for clay, stone and wood which only the art of making can give".[89] This means that the material for the Secondary World is based on – or even the same as – material found in the real world. More importantly, though, Tolkien loves his material, and he wants the reader to share in that love, recognising the everyday as something to be admired and appreciated. Because fantasy tries to present something in a new way, it could set this hoard free "and let all the locked things fly away like cage-birds. The gems all turn into flowers or flames, and you will be warned that all you had (or knew) was dangerous and potent... free and wild, no more yours than they were you".[90] The fear caused by the dangers present in Faërie can translate, in a way, to the real world, reminding the reader that the world is not as safe as it

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[89] Tolkien, 1964, p. 53

[90] Tolkien, 1964, p. 53

seems and that nothing should be taken for granted. Recovery initiates an appreciation of the world for what it is rather than what we think it is, reminding us of the wonder that the world contains.

When Tolkien says that the craftsman has a feeling for his material that "only the art of making can give", he is indicating the importance of sub-creation in allowing recovery. The implication is that ordinary people, people without the kind of creative imagination necessary to write a fantasy story, do not naturally have that feeling for the world, the wonder of the everyday. It is the duty of the fantasy author to create a world in which this wonder can be shown so that the reader can bring that back to the real world. Tolkien explains how fantasy can recreate the ordinary:

> By the forging of Gram cold iron was revealed; by the making of Pegasus horses were ennobled; in the Trees of the Sun and Moon root and stock, flower and fruit are manifested in glory... It was in fairy-stories that I first divined the potency of the words, and the wonder of the things, such as stone, and wood, and iron; tree and grass; house and fire; bread and wine.[91]

Only through sub-creation, then, can the Secondary World that can encourage recovery be formed, and only through this Secondary World can the reader experience recovery.

Inside his Secondary World of Middle-earth, Tolkien creates further, clearly delineated Secondary Worlds belonging to the Elves. More than belonging to them, these worlds could be said to have been *made* by the Elves. Tolkien says that Elves (or "elves", as he is writing about fairy stories in general and

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[91] Tolkien, 1964, p. 53

not about his Elves in particular) are largely made of "the desire for a living, realized sub-creative art... and it is from them that we may learn what is the central desire and aspiration of human Fantasy".[92] Tolkien's creations, then, seem to create further worlds of their own, inside which the characters in the book can undergo recovery and the reader can be shown the process of recovery more clearly.

Tolkien demonstrates this quickly in *Lord of the Rings*, as early as the first encounter with the Elves and using nothing more complex than a meal of bread and fruit: "Pippin... remembered that there was bread, surpassing the savour of a fair white loaf to one who is starving; and fruits sweet as wildberries and richer than the tended fruits of gardens".[93] Christopher Garbowski points out, "Not only a more focused reality, but not infrequently an attempt to evoke a reality more real than the quotidian one we know seems to inspire the author of Middle-earth".[94] Tolkien wants to evoke that "more real than real" quality in *The Lord of the Rings* because it is necessary to recovery. The meal created by the Elves is special, better than the real thing, a kind of embodiment of the idea of bread and fruit. Like Tolkien in the real world, the Elves have a feeling for their material that others do not, and they seem to re-create aspects of the ordinary world in such a way as to make others notice those aspects. They take the ordinary in Middle-earth, which is already once removed from the ordinary in the real world, and translate it to something more, something different enough to awaken appreciation for the ordinary,

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[92] Tolkien, 1964, p. 48-49

[93] *FotR*, p. 109

[94] Garbowski, 2004, p. 141

much as Tolkien is doing in Middle-earth as a whole, but in a more concentrated form.

While this trend of making the ordinary extraordinary continues throughout the first book, it reaches its pinnacle with the description of Lothlórien. This is not surprising, since through Galadriel and her Ring, the Lórien Elves have the greatest degree of control over their environment and can thus make their world into what they want it to be. Early on, Frodo notices the sound of a river: "It seemed to him that he would never hear again a running water so beautiful, for ever blending its innumerable notes in an endless changeful music".[95] This is not just *a* river. In a way, it is *the* river, one that can remind the reader and Frodo that they do not necessarily know, understand, and own the concept of "rivers". When the Company is blindfolded and led through Lórien, the descriptions are toned down so that when the blindfolds are removed, the effect on the reader is similar to that of the effect on Frodo, who is astonished at the beauty he sees:

> When his eyes were in turn uncovered, Frodo looked up and caught his breath... To the left stood a great mound, covered with a sward of grass as green as Springtime in the Elder Days. Upon it, as a double crown, grew two circles of trees: the outer had bark of snowy white, and were leafless but beautiful in their shapely nakedness; the inner were mallorn-trees of great height, still arrayed in pale gold.[96]

What is described is slightly more real than reality: the grass is greener than it could be anywhere but in Lórien, the trees are more beautiful than any encountered in our world – pure white and pale gold – and so on. Tolkien

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[95] *FotR*, p. 453

[96] *FotR*, p. 459

allows his own love of the real world to shine through in this idealised description of Lórien – a description made believable because of the presence of Elves, who have the ability to create, or at least to maintain, such beauty in their world.

This beauty is seen through the eyes of the characters as well as by the reader. It seems fairly obvious that Frodo undergoes recovery in Lórien, as he appears to see things anew:

> He saw no colour but those he knew, gold and white and blue and green, but they were fresh and poignant, as if he had at that moment first perceived them and made for them names new and wonderful.[97]

The description of colours is phrased very similarly to Tolkien's explanation of the need for recovery: the need to look at green and to see anew "blue and yellow and red". In a similar way, Tolkien encourages recovery in his reader. By creating a second Secondary World within the initial Secondary World of Middle-earth, Tolkien makes the hyper-realism of what he describes more believable so that the reader will accept the idealised view of things, the way that the ordinary real world has been translated into the extraordinary through the sub-creation of the Elves. Because the reader does not recoil from an unrealistic depiction of the world, he or she will find it easier to wonder at that world and, hopefully, will carry an element of that wonder back to reality, realising that the world is not as easily put into boxes as one might think. Throughout the book, Tolkien's love of his material shines through, and in his

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[97] *FotR*, p. 461

descriptions of Elvish spaces in particular, he allows his readers to share that love.

CHAPTER TWO: TIME AND ESCAPE

Other Time

Just as Tolkien carefully established Elvish spaces as separate from those belonging to the other races in Middle-earth, he shows that Elvish time functions differently as well. From the way Elves count time to the longing they feel for the past, which results in a kind of diluted time field surrounding Elvish spaces, this difference is shown again and again. As mentioned in Chapter 1, in *On Fairy-Stories,* Tolkien mentions that Faërie functions in Other Time, a time that is flexible and difficult for mortals to account for. Tolkien says that fairy stories "open a door on Other Time, and if we pass through, though only for a moment, we stand outside our own time, outside Time itself, maybe".[98] Fantasy gives us the opportunity to step not only from our world to a different one, but from our time to a different one – not necessarily into the past or the future, but into a time that functions in a different way from ours.

This Other Time, combined with Tolkien's Secondary World, enables what he calls "Escape". He defines this as essentially "the imaginative satisfaction of ancient desires"[99] along with the ability to leave behind, for a time, the danger and unhappiness inherent in the real world. Tolkien does this on two levels. Middle-earth is clearly a Secondary World, and it takes place in a time that is not our own. More than this, the Elvish lands, as discussed previously, become Secondary Worlds within a Secondary World, and they function in a time that, to the inhabitants of Middle-earth, is Other Time, and is thus doubly

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[98] Tolkien, 1964, p. 33

[99] Tolkien, 1964, p. 60

so to the reader. The entry into Elvish Other Time is emphasised by frequently dreamlike descriptions and mentions of the characters feeling as if they are in a dream state as well as the fact that these characters tend to lose track of time while inside it.

If Middle-earth allows the reader to escape the Primary World, the Elvish spaces, in a way, allow the characters and the reader to escape from that world to another, more distant Secondary World in which the problems in Middle-earth are diluted, when they are present at all. However, the Elvish Secondary World is not as perfect as it seems, and Tolkien uses the Elvish attitude to time to underscore this. As already noted, Elves tend to want to keep things the way they are, but Tolkien is aware that change is both inevitable and necessary. He uses Middle-earth to provide escape for the reader, but while Elvish spaces build on this, they also demonstrate that sometimes, when used to arrest change, escape can actually be negative.

Reckoning of Time

The difference between Elves and other races is rooted in their very nature, immortality versus mortality, as demonstrated by the way they calculate time. Noel points out:

> Just as [Tolkien] used differences in languages to indicate differences in peoples, he used the differing methods of reckoning time between men and Elves to indicate their differing outlooks on time. Men reckoned time in twelve-month solar years. The Elves' solar-year calendar was based on the growth cycles of vegetation, and they named their six seasons for stages in the growth of plants. [100]

[100] Noel, 1977, p. 40

Men look to the sun for their seasons, while Elves look to nature, to plants. This is completely in keeping with the fact that Tolkien continuously presents the Elves as considerably more in harmony with nature than anyone else, that humans interact with nature as a source of food more than anything where the Elves actually harness nature. Elves are not concerned with the turning of the world, which indicates time slipping away, but with the cycles of the seasons, which indicate changes in nature. It also means, though, that they have separated themselves in terms of time as well as space to the point that a human might not understand the way their time works, in the same way as an Elf might not quite understand how human time works.

Legolas demonstrates this disparity in a conversation after leaving Lórien, when he says:

> Time does not tarry ever... but change and growth is not in all things and places alike. For Elves the world moves, and it moves both very swift and very slow. Swift, because they themselves change little, and all else fleets by; it is a grief to them. Slow, because they do not count the running years, not for themselves.[101]

This is a succinct summary of the Elvish attitude to time; they wish for the world to change more slowly, or not at all, and they do not count the years, whereas humans never stop counting them. In fact, as mentioned in the introduction, when mortals, particularly hobbits, enter Elvish space, they tend to lose track of time, as though by entering this world, they are absorbed by it to a degree. They live by the same rules as the world in which they find themselves: they are separate from their primary world; they do not count

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[101] *FotR*, p. 510

time; and they do not change significantly while there. When the mortal characters in *The Lord of the Rings* escape to Elvish space, in other words, that escape is all but absolute. None of the concerns raised in Middle-earth is resolved there. In places like Lórien and Rivendell, the characters are content to let time pass them by, at least for a while.

Change and Longing

That the characters do not come to any kind of resolution in Elvish space is the part of *The Lord of the Rings* that most contradicts Frye's green world theory, as established in the introduction: the characters do not enter Elvish space to resolve conflicts, but to escape them. Apart from one or two uneasy references, the central concerns of the novel are essentially frozen until the characters leave their safe haven and resume living in "mortal time". The reason for this is related to the Elvish desire to hold onto the past. Because of their long lives, they cannot help but remember the way things used to be, and they tend to want to recapture that. Tolkien indicates that the Elves are lost in "the heart-racking sense of the vanished past".[102] The problem arises when the Elves become so lost in this desire for the past that they do not want to change:

> The Elvish weakness was in these terms naturally to regret the past, and to become unwilling to face change... Hence they fell in a measure to Sauron's deceits: They desired some 'power' over things as they are... to make their particular will to preservation effective: to arrest change, and keep things always fresh and fair.[103]

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[102] Tolkien in Purtill, 1984, p.13

[103] Tolkien in Flieger, 1997, p. 211

The desire to avoid change leads to the desire for the power to keep things as they are, which is a fundamental flaw in the nature of the Elves because to refuse change is to refuse life.

Flieger notes that although Tolkien might have exalted the Elves and Elvish things in *The Lord of the Rings*, he highlights a different side of them in his letters, saying that they "wanted to have their cake and eat it: to live in the mortal historical Middle-earth because they had become fond of it... and so tried to stop its change and history, stop its growth, keep it as a pleasuaunce".[104] The idea of keeping the world as a "pleasuance" implies that the Elves feel a sense of ownership about their land and see it almost patronisingly; it also invokes a kind of artificiality, as though it is a "created artefact"[105] over which the Elves have control. When the Elves have power over their surroundings, they can change them as they see fit – or, as the case may be, stop changes; they appropriate the world around them and keep it the way it is. This is ultimately negative because the world then becomes static and sterile: nothing new ever arises. They also take escape to an unhealthy level, which will be discussed later. In the book, then, the slowing of time in Elvish spaces is indicative of their desire to halt the changes brought about by time's passing.

This desire adds to the sense of separation discussed in the previous chapter; Elves are very connected, very in tune, with nature, with the world in that

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[104] Tolkien in Flieger, 1997, p. 110

[105] Tiffin, 1995, p. 26

sense, but at the same time, they are disconnected from the outside world, from people and events that threaten to disrupt their way of life and of seeing things. While their early history, as described in *The Silmarillion*, was filled with historically significance events, by the time *The Lord of the Rings* takes place, very little of that kind happens to them. This is to a large extent due to their deliberate removal of themselves from the historical occurrences in Middle-earth; Elves see themselves as part of the slow cycle of nature rather than the faster cycle of culture. Flieger says that "The most important difference [between Elves and Men] is that mankind dies and leaves the world when its comparatively short span is over, whereas Elves do not die and are bound to the world for as long as it lasts".[106] The Elves are bound to the world not only in the sense of being unable to leave it, but also in the sense of being un*willing* to leave it because they love it. They could live in Valinor, but the Lórien Elves, in particular, are reluctant to leave their land behind. At the same time, they cannot really relate to species that are so much more short-lived than they are, and so they withdraw.

The desire to stop the world from moving on, coupled with the inability to do so, causes significant sadness in the Elves, which, as Kevin Aldrich points out, "arises out of love for their lands and works which cannot be held on to because of the ravages of time, whether through natural changes or the injuries of their enemies".[107] Their attempts to halt time to counter this

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[106] Flieger, 2002, p. 52

[107] Aldrich, 1999, p. 93

sadness caused Tolkien to see his Elves, probably his favourite creations, as deeply flawed. He says:

> They wanted the peace and bliss and perfect memory of 'The West', and yet to remain on the ordinary earth where their prestige as the highest people... was greater than at the bottom of the hierarchy of Valinor. They thus became obsessed with 'fading', the mode in which the changes of time... [were] perceived by them. They became sad, and their art... antiquarian, and their efforts all really a kind of embalming – even though they also retained the old motive of their kind, the adornment of the earth, and the healing of its hurts.[108]

The Elves began to think of change itself as evil, which, mostly according to his letters, Tolkien sees as wrong because it goes against the will of the god that created them. Aldrich notes that Elves do have a finite lifespan, that they end when the world does, and that Eru, the head god of Middle-earth, *wants* them to fade; he has designed the world that way. Change is necessary because without it, nothing can grow, and there can be no new perceptions, no development of a civilisation or its ideas. However, Tolkien has difficulty in focusing on the negative side of the Elves, since he felt a wistful regret for the green fields of his own childhood in Oxford and thus empathised with their point of view.

Certainly, with Tolkien's description of the Elves, one is hard-pressed to find fault with them, and their dislike of change is subtle. Purtill believes, though, that the Elves are not necessarily what Tolkien favours above all else: "It is the *past*, the unknown, unrecorded past that is numinous for Tolkien".[109] Flieger agrees that Tolkien's time, a historically chaotic one, "often

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[108] Tolkien in Aldrich, 1999, p. 94-5

[109] Purtill, 1984, p. 14

engendered in him a reaction that was in its own way equally modern: a nostalgic longing for a return to a lost past coupled with the knowledge that this was impossible save in the realm of the imagination".[110] Flieger is referring to an idealised past of green fields and lost innocence; in *On Fairy-Stories*, Tolkien points out his distaste for industrialisation and the lack of beauty in the modern world. Even in Tolkien's imagination, though, a return to that past is unattainable, perhaps because Tolkien recognized the futility of the desire for it. Although the Elves do manage to keep their world the same for a short while, they still eventually fade. While they exist, however, their desire to slow down the passage of time results in distorted perceptions of time when mortals cross the boundaries of their lands.

The sense of time slowed is present even in the first meeting with the Elves, indicated by at least one of the characters entering a dreamlike state. When Gildor and his troop happen upon Frodo, Pippin and Sam, the atmosphere changes instantly from one of fear to one of anticipation, and throughout this encounter, the characters seem more and more divorced from their own world and seem to enter the world of the Elves. When the Elves join the hobbits, Pippin "soon [begins] to feel sleepy", and "Sam [walks] along... as if in a dream".[111] In addition to this, the memory of time spent with the Elves is fragmented, like something half-remembered upon awakening:

> Pippin afterwards recalled little of either food or drink, for his mind was filled with the light upon the elf-faces, and the sound of voices so various and so beautiful that he felt in a waking dream... Sam could never describe in words, nor picture clearly to himself, what

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[110] Flieger, 1997, p. 3

[111] *FotR*, p. 107

> he felt or thought that night, though it remained in his memory as one of the chief events of his life.[112]

This dreamy feeling, this lack of noting events that would mark the passage of time, is consistent with Tolkien's descriptions of Faërie as a dream woven by the mind that created it; the Elves, in a sense, because of their desire to stay the passage of time in their world, use their closeness to nature to change their surroundings, to create a world more in keeping with their wishes. In keeping the company of the Elves, the hobbits have temporarily joined that world.

Rivendell is a much livelier encounter with the Elves than the one with Gildor and the trip to Lórien later in the book. Because Elrond is half-elven, he and his kin are permitted to choose whether they want to remain immortal or take on the mortality of humankind, which means that they have the option of letting go of the world. Flieger says, "Men can let go of life; they be [sic] released from bondage to the world... Elves, in their deathlessness, their bondage to life, cannot let go. The half-elven have the freedom to choose either fate".[113] They are capable of leaving the world, even if they choose not to. Because of this, and because Rivendell is open to visitors and is not quite as separate from the rest of Middle-earth as other places such as Lórien, it is not entirely its own Secondary World in isolation and is less resistant to change. This translates into an attitude to time that, while still different from mortals, is slightly less rigidly in favour of return to the past than is found in Lórien.

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[112] FotR, p. 109

[113] Flieger, 2002, p. 144

In Rivendell, the hobbits actually have entered into Elvish space rather than joining a band of Elves who carry their own space around with them. Not surprisingly, then, the feeling of time diluted is stronger in this meeting. When Frodo first goes to explore Rivendell, for example, it seems to be lagging behind the seasons. "The air was warm. The sound of running and falling water was loud, and the evening was filled with a faint scent of trees and flowers, as if summer still lingered in Elrond's gardens".[114] Summer is clinging to Rivendell – or Rivendell is clinging to summer. Bilbo, too, reinforces the concept of Rivendell as a place in which time acts differently: "Time doesn't seem to pass here: it just is".[115] The Hall of Fire in particular evokes the dreamlike feeling of enchantment that indicates entrance into Faërie, where time slows. Rivendell, then, is the first clear example of Elvish space that attempts to stop the passing of time in order to avoid change.

Although the different flow of time in Rivendell is clearer than it was with the Elves earlier in the book, there is little sense of melancholy. In fact, Rivendell appears to impart a cheerful air on its visitors: "It seems impossible," says Pippin, "to feel gloomy or depressed in this place. I feel I could sing, if I knew the right song for the occasion".[116] Because Elrond and his family are allowed to choose whether they want to become mortal, even if they do not take this opportunity, they are not bound to the world to the extent of other Elves. They are still reluctant to change and they still grieve for the past, but the effect is diluted because of that possibility of moving on: they remember and perhaps

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[114] *FotR*, p. 296

[115] *FotR*, p. 303

[116] *FotR*, p. 296

regret the past rather than wanting to return to it. They are willing to take part in the world to some extent, since Elrond does take part in human affairs, putting the Fellowship together and setting them on their path. He also eventually gives up his daughter to the human world. Overall, then, Rivendell does hold part of the timelessness of the Elves, but to a much lesser extent than Lórien. This is driven home when, in Lórien, Frodo reflects that Rivendell holds the memory of the past, while in Lórien, the past lives on.

Because Lórien is the place in Middle-earth where the Elves are the most Elvish, it is perhaps not surprising that it is the place where the time difference is most obvious. Like the other Secondary Worlds of the Elves, Lórien offers respite to the Company by making the external world seem distant: Sam makes the connection between slowed time and reluctance to change quite clearly when he says, "It's wonderfully quiet here. Nothing seems to be going on, and no one seems to want it to".[117] Sam phrases this in a positive way, and in that it contributes to a kind of escape, it is. However, the fact that nothing is going on is actually an indication of the negative side of the Elves: yet again, there is a suggestion of their resistance to change. There is also an implied contrast to Rivendell; while time there "just is", there are certainly things going on.

From the first moment that the Fellowship arrives in Cerin Amroth, Tolkien makes it clear that Elves prefer to live in a world that has passed away:

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[117] *FotR*, p. 473

> As soon as he set foot upon the far bank of Silverlode, a strange feeling had come upon him, and it deepened as he walked on into the Naith: it seemed to him that he had stepped over a bridge of time into a corner of the Elder Days, and was now walking in a world that was no more. In Rivendell there was a memory of ancient things; in Lórien the ancient things still lived on in the waking world... It seemed to [Frodo] that he had stepped through a high window that looked on a vanished world... All that he saw was shapely, but the shapes seemed at once clear cut, as if they had been first conceived and drawn at the uncovering of his eyes, and ancient as if they had endured forever.[118]

In this extract, the present and the past are constantly tied together, the two different worlds connected by a bridge of time. Even the seasons are a mix of times: "The air was cool and soft, as if it were early spring, yet they felt about them the deep and thoughtful quiet of winter".[119] Everything, all around, hearkens back to days long gone by, but in such a way that they seem inescapably *present.* Morse says that "Tolkien's Elves are continually recalling the past through memory".[120] In Lórien, this goes further: their memories of the past are so strong that, to a degree, it is still alive. This blending of past and present results in a time that is as close to frozen as is possible, which, while a bad thing in that it denies change, does enable a kind of escape that might otherwise not be possible – and which is *not* possible in Rivendell, where Elrond engages with the outside world.

This meshing of times creates a hazy feel around the present time in the book, enhanced by the fact that the dream-state is introduced almost immediately in Lórien. When the blindfolds are removed from the Company, Frodo notices that "Sam was now standing beside him, looking round with a

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[118] *FotR*, p. 458-60

[119] *FotR*, p. 470

[120] Morse, 2002, p. 169

puzzled expression, and rubbing his eyes as if he was not sure that he was awake. '...I feel as if I was *inside* a song, if you take my meaning'".[121] As well as the timelessness of the dream, Sam's observation indicates that the Company has entered a Secondary World. Here, the song Sam mentions is a form of sub-creation on the part of the Elves, who create their world as one apart from the world of the other races. This first display of the Elvish Secondary Worlds as timeless is quickly followed by others. Flieger points out that "[i]t is notable that none of the Fellowship is described as having dreams... Rather, it would seem that the experience of being [in Lórien] is itself the dream".[122] In addition, the Fellowship's recollections about how long they spent in Lórien are fuzzy: "They remained some days in Lothórien, so far as they could tell or remember",[123] says Tolkien. This, again, reflects Tolkien's description of entry into Faërie as a kind of dream, yet again setting off Lórien as a place apart from everywhere outside its borders. Because Lórien is so clearly differentiated, it is easier to see that the inhabitants of this place, through their longing for the past, tend to reject change.

While the Elves' curious relationship to time makes Lórien all the more mysterious, it also alerts the reader to the way the Elves live in the past rather than embracing the present. In fact, Purtill calls Elvish possessiveness of their surroundings and resistance to change a "form of avarice".[124] They appropriate their surroundings and want to hold onto what they have rather

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[121] *FotR*, p. 460

[122] Flieger, 1997, p. 192

[123] *FotR*, p. 470

[124] Purtill, 1984, p. 104

than allowing themselves to change with the world around them. Galadriel may well take the place of a fertility goddess in Frye's theories, but, as mentioned in the previous chapter, she keeps things from fading rather than enabling renewal – forcing Lórien to remain static rather than allowing it to embrace anything new.

One of Tolkien's desires was to use the "timeless beauty" of the Elves to show that "immortality is a prison, that a timeless world is a frozen world, that beauty preserved is beauty embalmed".[125] That Tolkien named death the "gift of Ilúvatar" is no accident: because the Elves were doomed to live on in a changing world, always regretting and reaching for the past, they stopped facing the inevitability of change. Beauty without vitality is pointless; without change, there can be no new perceptions.[126] This actually recalls Tolkien's views on recovery. Recovery is seeing the world anew – altering perceptions in order to increase appreciation of the world, to help see the world as it is and not as we *think* it is. While the Elvish spaces can aid in the recovery of a reader and of the characters, the Elves are unable to undergo it themselves. They do not *want* to see the world as it is; they see it as they want to see it, as they wish it were, and because they have a kind of magic available to them, their world, to some degree, bends to their wishes. Thus, they impose their wishes on the world around them because they cannot let go of the beauty

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[125] Flieger, 1997, p. 6; see also John Garth, 2005, p. 298, who attributes this attitude to Tolkien's experiences in WWI: the desire for timelessness and deathlessness is understandable given the destruction of that time, but Tolkien always acknowledged the inevitability of change.

[126] Flieger, 2002

that they love – a form of avarice and, again, against the will of the god that created the world so that it would change and develop.

Lórien is beautiful, but it never changes. This means, says Flieger, "there is a concealed sting in Lórien's beauty. Its timelessness is not the unspoiled perfection it seems. Rather, that very perfection is its flaw. It is a cautionary picture... shown to us in all its beauty to test if we can let it go".[127] The timeless nature of Lórien is a signal of the Elves' inability to honour the will of Eru and allow what they find beautiful to pass away, even though this kind of change enables renewal. The Elves are trapped by their own desire for beauty. In the section where the Fellowship leaves Lórien, Tolkien demonstrates that their way of living is not practical or sustainable when Frodo watches Galadriel: "Already she seemed to him... present and yet remote, a living vision of that which has already been left far behind by the flowing streams of time".[128] Here, again, Tolkien plays on the idea of Lothlórien and its inhabitants as the living past. In this case, though, he gives the strong impression that they have stopped, that time has quite literally passed them by.

As the Company move downriver, this impression is cemented:

> As they passed her they turned and their eyes watched her slowly floating away from them. For so it seemed to them: Lórien was slipping backward... sailing on to forgotten shores, while they sat helpless upon the margin of the grey and leafless world.[129]

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[127] Flieger, 1997, p. 112

[128] *FotR*, p. 490

[129] *FotR*, p. 495

Not only has Lórien stopped moving forward through time, it has now started to move backward. Though the Fellowship regrets leaving Lórien to enter a world that is "grey and leafless", the manner in which the Elves seem to move backward while they stay still is indicative of a clear rejection of the future. This is unsurprising, since in his note on "Elvish Time", Tolkien observes:

> In Elvish sentiment the *future* was not one of hope or desire, but a decay and retrogression from former bliss and power. Though inevitably it lay *ahead*, as of one on a journey, 'looking forward' did not imply anticipation of delight... Their position, as of latter day sentiment, was one of exiles driven forward (against their will) who were in mind or actual posture forever looking backward.[130]

The Elves look at the future with a kind of resentment rather than the hope exhibited by Men.

Here, Tolkien makes it clear that the reason the Elves long for the past is that they begrudge the fading of their kind. Ironically, this longing could well have contributed to that fading: because the Elves avoid change, they also avoid renewal, and so they become less and less relevant to the changing Middle-earth. Flieger concludes that, because of this attitude toward the past, "Men are *pro*ceeding into the future, while Elves are *re*ceding into it".[131] This is exactly the image elicited when the Company sees Galadriel as they sail upriver, where Tolkien draws a clear distinction between the world of the mortals, ever-changing, and the timeless, frozen world of the Elves.

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[130] Tolkien in Flieger, 1997, p. 70

[131] Flieger, 1997, p. 70

The longing for the past is a characteristic that Tolkien shares with his Elves, although he is aware enough of the dangers inherent in it to allow for change. This longing comes through most strongly in his work when he writes about the Elves, and the separation of Elvish lands that results from this longing enables the second of Tolkien's stated functions of fairy-stories: escape. Although the Secondary World of the Elves and Frye's green world are similar, as discussed in the previous chapter, their function differs. While the characters in Frye's theory enter the green world to resolve conflict and become their "true selves", in *The Lord of the Rings*, no resolution takes place in the green world of Elvish space. Instead, the characters move to those spaces to escape the dire situations in the "real" world for a brief time before going back to face them. Elvish space is used as an escape from the trials and tribulations of the "real" world of Middle-earth, and legitimately so; it acts as a space in which the characters are healed and recharged, strengthened to continue their quest. This is demonstrated by the fact that every venture into Elvish space is preceded by a frightening and usually violent ordeal – the Black Riders before the encounter with Gildor, the Nazgul at the River before Rivendell, Moria and the loss of Gandalf before Lórien, and destroying the ring for Frodo and Sam and going into battle vastly outnumbered for Aragorn and the others before the second visit to Rivendell.

This makes the contrasting peace and quiet of Elvish lands all the more clear, enabling them to serve even better as Secondary Worlds in which the characters can rest and recover. Aldrich says, "Lórien is a sanctuary in the

midst of the transient world where there is not only no evil, but time itself seems to have halted"[132] – taking "escape" a step forward from Rivendell, where time is a factor. The word "sanctuary" is important: the characters are safe in Lórien and in Rivendell. In Rivendell, Frodo reflects that "[m]erely to be there [is] a cure for weariness, fear, and sadness",[133] and the Company is able to rest in Lórien as well. However, in Lórien, they are out of the "transient world", in a place where time does not seem to pass. There is no evil – "On the land of Lórien there was no stain"[134] – but that means that the characters cannot complete any of their tasks or resolve any problems, although they can discuss what comes next and make plans. They do not leave the spaces wholly unchanged, but for the most part, the changes that occur are set off by an event *before* they enter Elvish space and are solidified by the time spent there – not because of where they are, exactly, but because they have time to consider these events and respond to them. The loss of Gandalf, for example, has a profound effect on the Company that they only have time to process once they are in Lórien. Once they leave Elvish space, they must resume facing the challenges that arose before they entered it, perhaps slightly better armed but without any clear resolutions and, sometimes, with more questions than before. The escape is useful, since the characters do leave feeling more rested and regenerated.

It is not only the characters that can use Elvish space to escape from their worries for a time. Tolkien sets up Middle-earth and Elvish spaces as

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[132] Aldrich, 1999, p. 94

[133] *FotR*, p. 295

[134] *FotR*, p. 460

Secondary Worlds that the readers can use to escape from their own lives. "Escape" might bring to mind the idea of fleeing something unpleasant, and while that is a part of Tolkien's definition, he does go further. The cynicism that makes recovery necessary also makes people dubious about the relevance of escape, but Tolkien insists:

> In what the misusers are fond of calling Real Life, Escape is evidently as a rule very practical, and may even be heroic... Why should a man be scorned if, finding himself in prison, he tries to get out and go home? Or if, when he cannot do so, he thinks and talks about other topics than jailers and prison-walls?[135]

To desire a brief interlude away from the horrors of modern life is not something to be ashamed of. Reilly agrees that "this kind of solace or respite is necessary... it is a time needed to regroup one's forces for the next day's battle".[136] This time, as Reilly notes, allows fortification through the rest allowed and through the perspective gained from moving away from this battle for a while; Escape is thus more important than most people realise.

For Tolkien, modern time is simply *ugly*: ugly architecture, ugly factories, ugly clothing. He says, "It is part of the malady of such days – producing the desire to escape, not indeed from life, but from our present time and self-made misery – that we are acutely conscious both of the ugliness of our works, and of their evil".[137] It is this ugliness from which the reader needs to escape. A parallel could be drawn between the human desire to escape from present time and the Elvish desire to recapture the past. However, the Elves are not escaping the present as much as they are reaching for the past, longing for

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[135] Tolkien, 1964, p. 54

[136] Reilly, 2004, p. 101

[137] Tolkien, 1964, p. 57

days in which they were more powerful, more esteemed, more relevant. Humans, on the other hand, want to escape particularly unsavoury aspects of present time, whether that escape is into a time parallel to ours or somewhere in the past or future. This involves a retreat into a kind of idealised time, a "Golden Age" of innocence and beauty.

Escapism does not end there, of course. "There are also other and more profound 'escapisms' that have always appeared in fairy-tale and legend": people need to escape from all the bad things in the world, "hunger, thirst, poverty, pain, sorrow, injustice, death".[138] Middle-earth is not a perfect world. Any reader expecting not to encounter death, pain, sorrow, and ugliness in *The Lord of the Rings* is bound to be disappointed. Flieger says that "[Tolkien] played hide and seek with [his] own time. [He] looked at the world around [him], found it wanting in many respects, and... dodged into imaginary worlds that turned out to be not much better".[139] The Elvish spaces in the book, though, in their bubble of time-past, are probably as close to idyllic as Tolkien could imagine. More importantly, the inner Secondary World is able to provide the respite the characters need to face the evil present in Middle-earth, and in a similar way provides the reader with the fortitude needed to face another day in the modern world.

While the Elves themselves are waning as a race and their creation of Secondary Worlds and Other Time contribute to that waning, they also

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[138] Tolkien, 1964, p. 58

[139] Flieger, 1997, p. 26

provide a place that is set apart from the turmoil in Middle-earth, where, unlike in *The Lord of the Rings* as a whole, hunger, thirst, poverty, and so on really do not exist. Sorrow exists, but it is a distant kind of sorrow that humans cannot fully understand. Although Middle-earth is no less tumultuous than Tolkien's own time, the Elvish spaces offer respite from that tumult; Elvish time and space are two removes from the time present in the Primary World, allowing at least part of the book to offer an escape from any unhappiness present in the world of the reader, and in the Secondary World in the form of Sauron and Saruman, even though permanently underlying that escape is the knowledge that, like the Elves' own escape from the movement of time, it can be only temporary.

While Elvish space offers a temporary, near-complete escape, Middle-earth as a whole offers escape of a different kind. We can move from our imperfect world to one that is also imperfect, but less so. It is an idealised world in which beauty can be found almost everywhere and good wins the day. The characters in Middle-earth are able to triumph over evil because, unlike most of the Elves, they are willing to face change, to be part of the world as it moves on. If the Fellowship had given in to the desire to stay in the timeless land of Lórien, Sauron would never have been overthrown, the Shire would never have been saved, and Aragorn would never have become king. That the mortals are the ones that drive change toward the good in Middle-earth is indicative of the Elves' greatest flaw: they would rather wrap themselves in their own world than take part in the world around them.

According to Flieger, one of the ideas crucial to Tolkien's philosophy is the "inevitability and absolute necessity of change... From change... comes growth and development. Out of change comes new perception".[140] Though he recognises and, to some extent, succumbs to the allure of the timelessness of the Elves, ultimately, Tolkien knows that this is escape in the negative sense, the avoidance of the necessity of getting on with life. By rejecting change, Elves are rejecting the possibility of renewing themselves. As Flieger puts it:

> Desire to preserve a present good inevitably becomes desire to keep it from passing, but this leads to stagnation. The process of change is part of the design, and must continue if the design is to be fulfilled.[141]

Though the Elves mean well in their desire to preserve their world, this desire has long-term negative effects for their race. Treebeard points out that the shortening of the name of Lórien from Laurelindórenan to Lothlórien is an indication of how the Elves' reluctance to embrace change leads to them "fading, not growing".[142] The Elves withdraw from the world into their spaces in which they can avoid the effects of time moving relentlessly onward, and by doing so, they give up their chance of contributing to the world and of moving with it. They must inevitably decline because of their desire to escape.

There is one kind of escape that Tolkien mentions in *On Fairy Stories* that he classes among the "old ambitions and desires" and about which the Elves are uniquely suited to teach a lesson. In fact, he calls it "the oldest and deepest

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[140] Flieger, 2002, p. 167

[141] Flieger, 2002, p. 170

[142] *TTT*, p. 82

desire, the Great Escape: the Escape from Death".[143] His aim is to depict immortality itself as something negative that impedes the progress of a society and offer instead "life eternal" – the afterlife offered by Christian mythology. Because mortals can die, they can let go of life and the world; because they can let go, they can change and thrive. Immortals, as has been discussed, are unable to let go. This depiction of immortality as something that is less attractive than one might expect is closely tied in to the extended lifespan of the Elves and what Tolkien calls "consolation" and so must be discussed in the next chapter.

[143] Tolkien, 1964, p. 59

CHAPTER THREE: DEATH AND CONSOLATION

Elvish Immortality

Previous chapters argued that the Elvish reluctance to change is related to their immortality. Even when Elves do die of sadness or from war, they do not move on to any next life; instead, they wait in the halls of Mandos to be reincarnated. When this happens, they eventually regain their memories of their previous life, so that they never really die.[144] Caldecott notes that "[t]he Elves are immortal nature spirits bound to the world through reincarnation, and so their existence is permeated by this sense of tragedy".[145] Again, as mentioned in the previous chapter, the tragedy arises from the fact that the world to which the Elves are bound must change continuously and against their will; the things that they love will die and pass away while they continue. Their desire to halt this change means that, although they are presented as the highest people of Middle-earth, their civilisation is moribund. It certainly appears that Tolkien was trying to set up a negative view on immortality, and he did so with a specific aim in mind.

Tolkien wants to hold up the Elves' attitudes to life and to death next to those of the humans in his book. In his letters, he says:

> The real theme [of the story] for me is about something much more permanent and difficult [than power]: Death and Immortality: the mystery of the love of the world in the hearts of a race 'doomed' to leave and seemingly lose it: the anguish in the hearts of a race

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[144] Tolkien, 1994

[145] Caldecott, 1999, p. 26

'doomed' not to leave it until its whole evil-aroused story is complete.[146]

Tolkien wants to use the sorrow of the Elves at being forced to watch a changing world to contrast with the sorrow of humans at being forced to leave the world, changeful though it is; he uses this to explore "the positive and negative sides of death as well as its opposite, unending life, and its corollary, life eternal".[147] Life eternal is not the same thing as unending life; Tolkien makes a clear distinction between "unending life, which he sees as bondage to the world without hope of renewal, and eternal life, which transcends death and leads to God".[148] Far from fairies such as Elves being supernatural, as people often assume them to be, he says, "it is man who is, in contrast to fairies, supernatural (and often of diminutive stature); whereas they are natural, far more natural than he. Such is their doom".[149] What he means is that fairies, Elves, are tied to the world in a way that humans are not because while humans can die and move on to a life that is truly everlasting, in the religious sense, Elves must live in the world until it ends.

While the Elves do live forever, theirs is not a true immortality because they end when the world ends, while death for humans results in true eternal life. To die, and to live after death, makes humans supernatural because they can let go of and transcend nature, which Elves cannot. When Tolkien calls this their "doom", he no doubt means it not just as an indication of tragedy, but also as indicative of the differing fate of the two races. He calls death the "gift

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[146] Tolkien in Purtill, 1984, p.11

[147] Flieger, 2002, p. 29

[148] Flieger, 2002, p. 29

[149] Tolkien, 1964, p. 12

of Iluvatar", and he means it: to be tied to the world leads to sadness, the grief felt by the Elves as they are forced to watch the things they love change and die. Tolkien says that "The *human* problems are death and the desire for immortality... the Elvish problems are immortality and the desire for death".[150] While humans may be, and in *The Silmarillion* certainly are, jealous of the Elves' lifespan, the Elves may be jealous of the humans', or at the very least more aware of the gift of death than those upon whom the gift has been bestowed.

Valinor

The elements of Elvish space that Tolkien emphasises, the differences in attitudes to time, the longing for the past and the clear boundaries, relate to that difference in mortality. The Elvish spaces are timeless, reflecting the immortality of their occupants; the human spaces constantly reflect the mortality of theirs. Once again, the Elvish connection to the Sea is important, not just an indication of physical and mental separation, but also of the differing fate for Elves and mortals. Coupe points out that the sea (and certainly, then, the Sea) is "associated paradoxically with both death and new life – as with the Christian ritual of adult baptism".[151] Flieger agrees, saying, "In the real world's mythologies, water can suggest creation, transformation, death, the journey of the soul, and rebirth".[152] This means that the Elves going across the sea to return to Valinor is the Elvish, immortal equivalent of humans dying and then living on in a "new life", although it is only humans that

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[150] Tolkien in Purtill, 1984, p.11

[151] Coupe, 1997, p. 4

[152] Flieger, 2002, p. 99

can attain true immortality. That Valinor is located West of Middle-earth is no accident: Noel says, "People concerned with the daily cycle of the sun associated the west not only with death but also with immortality, for from the west the sun continued its apparent subterranean journey to its rising in the east".[153] The Elves leave Middle-earth, but continue elsewhere in the world, unlike people, whose continuation is a cause for debate. However, as Drout puts it, Elvish immortality is relative[154] because, as mentioned above, they last only as long as the world does. This means that, in fact, it is humans that are truly immortal even though they have to face uncertainty about what comes after death.

Tolkien's description of Elvish immortality as "endless serial living" is telling. It implies that they exist simply because they have no other option, as though they are trapped. This is supported by Tolkien's claim that although humans tell stories about the escape from Death using immortality of creatures such as Elves, "The human stories of the elves are doubtless full of the Escape from Deathlessness"[155]; Elves tell stories about human death in the same way that humans tell stories about Elvish immortality. Though Valinor does operate like a heaven of sorts, those that exist there are always aware that they are there because they have no alternative, even if they wanted one, except for the halls of Mandos; in fact, it is a form of exile from which they can never return. They are bound to the world until it ends, and while in Valinor, they really have no relevance to the world, as a whole, to which they are bound.

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[153] Noel, 1977, p. 53

[154] Drout, 2007

[155] Tolkien, 1964, p. 59

While Valinor is certainly presented as a sort of paradise for the Elves, then, the paradise that a true believer in Christianity, like Tolkien, can look forward to is far more valuable because it offers true eternal life and the ability to let go of life.

Immortality versus Death

Tolkien has more than only an ecumenical reason for the deathlessness of the Elves. As has previously been discussed, he also uses that immortality and the resultant reluctance to change to demonstrate that one cannot and should not remain in one place. He was saddened by the changes and destruction in his generation, but:

> Nonetheless, this very sense of passing and loss that on one level Tolkien mourned, on another level he celebrated. For to be capable of living is also to be capable of dying, and without death there can be no rebirth. Elves preserve. Men grow and die and grow again. It is in this respect that the contrast between Elves and Men is of such importance to Tolkien's vision.[156]

Without death, a race will stagnate. Because Men can die, their civilisations can grow because they have no ingrained need to keep things as they are – they all die before they can grow too attached to the past. This is why death is a gift despite the uncertainty of what comes after it, even though, particularly in the *Silmarillion* but also in *The Lord of the Rings,* people do not tend to see it that way. Interestingly, in *The Lord of the Rings*, Tolkien uses an Elf to demonstrate the "wrong" kind of attitude to have toward death – the one that most people will probably hold – and a human to display the kind of attitude that, judging by the *Silmarillion*, he would have admired. In the book itself, the

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[156] Flieger, 1997, p. 112

relationship between Aragorn, the heroic Ranger-king, and Arwen, the Elven princess, is hinted at more than clearly defined. However, Appendix A of the book makes that relationship clear and lets the reader know exactly what Arwen must give up in order to marry Aragorn, who tells her: "But neither, lady, is the Twilight for me; for I am a mortal, and if you will cleave to me, Evenstar, then the Twilight you must also renounce."[157]

Arwen's choice to give up immortality causes both her and her father considerable grief because they love each other, and mortality for Arwen means being forever parted from her family. Tolkien describes this parting in heavy terms: "grievous among the sorrows of that Age was the parting of Elrond and Arwen, for they were sundered by the Sea and by a doom beyond the end of the world".[158] Father and daughter are now separated by the same barrier that separates Elves from humans, giving a finality to her decision that seems to sink in only near the end of her story. Elrond correctly predicts Arwen's reaction to the end of her life when he says, "Alas, my son! I fear that to Arwen the Doom of Men may seem hard at the ending".[159] Indeed, Arwen's reaction is in sharp contrast to Aragorn's, perhaps not surprisingly, since she must face a fate that only two other Elves have ever had to face. Aragorn's reaction to death, on the other hand, is the same as that of the ancient kings of Númenor, from whom Aragorn is descended: acceptance.

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[157] *LotR*, Appendix A, p. 375

[158] *LotR*, Appendix A, p. 376

[159] *LotR*, Appendix A, p. 375

Early in his life, when his mother is dying, Aragorn voices Tolkien's key reason not to fear death: "there may be a light beyond the darkness; and if so, I would have you see it and be glad".[160] His mother expresses doubt at this concept, reflecting Tolkien's belief that all we have to cope with death is "hope without guarantees".[161] Despite his mother's apparent despair before her death, Aragorn's faith remains, and he faces his death with dignity. When Arwen protests, saying, "Would you... before your time leave your people that live by your word?" he responds, "Not before my time... for if I will not go now, then I must soon go perforce".[162] The Númenoreans fell because they stopped believing in the way that Aragorn does and started to rail against their deaths; they began to desire an Elvish lifespan and began to display an Elvish reluctance to change. Aragorn, however, returns to what Tolkien obviously sees as commendable behaviour by resigning himself to what is coming, asking Arwen whether "you would indeed have me wait until I wither and fall from my high seat unmanned and witless. Nay, lady, I am the last of the Númenoreans... and to me has been given... the grace to go at my will".[163] He has the power to let go of life when he knows that the end is near. More than merely accepting his own death, he tries to convey this acceptance to his wife. "I speak no comfort to you," he tells her, "for there is no comfort for such pain within the circles of the world".[164]

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[160] *LotR*, Appendix A, p. 376

[161] Flieger, 2002, p. 160

[162] *LotR*, Appendix A, p. 377

[163] *LotR*, Appendix A, p. 377

[164] *LotR*, Appendix A, p. 377

The implication, that there is comfort *outside* the circles of the world, is quickly made explicit: "In sorrow we must go, but not despair. Behold! We are not bound forever to the circles of the world, and beyond them is more than memory".[165] Here, Aragorn draws a stark contrast between humans and the Elvish way of life. In the Secondary Worlds created by the Elves, memory is what drives them. They separate those spaces so clearly from the rest of the world because they dislike change and want to keep their memories present, particularly in Lórien, which holds something of a living past. Humans, however, can go on to "more than memory". There is also the contrast between the idea of Elvish timelessness *within* the circles of the world, in the spaces that they have marked for themselves, and true immortality, eternal life, *beyond* the circles of the world. Aragorn's certainty that he will go on after death is probably the most obviously religious statement in the entire book, and it shows clearly that, in the eyes of the author, humans should not fear death because what follows is true, lasting immortality. Aragorn's faith illustrates Tolkien's belief that although there is no certainty about what happens after death, humans must accept it on faith; all we have is "hope without guarantees".[166]

By contrast, though she does face her death without trying to avoid it, Arwen is clearly reluctant, not only to face her own death but to face Aragorn's. She illustrates Flieger's view that "it is hard to face death, hard to accept loss,

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[165] *LotR*, Appendix A, p. 378

[166] Tolkien in Flieger, 2002, p. 144

hard, therefore, to find consolation in the Escape from Deathlessness".[167] First she asks Aragorn to rethink his decision to allow himself to die, but "for all her wisdom and lineage she could not forbear to plead with him to stay yet for a while. She was not yet weary of her days, and thus she tasted the bitterness of the mortality that she had taken upon her".[168] She finally recognizes that being mortal means giving up life – the life that, as an Elf, she could have held onto literally until the end of the world. Arwen does not recognize the same possibility of life after death as Aragorn does, referring to the "Doom of Men" as "the loss and the silence",[169] adding, "if this is indeed, as the Eldar say, the gift of the One to Men, it is bitter to receive".[170] Whether this lack of faith or simply the fact that she faces death with significantly less equanimity are responsible, Arwen's passing away is much less positive than Aragorn's. While Aragorn's death reveals a "great beauty" in him, observed with "wonder" by the people who see him, Arwen's goes unseen and unremarked. She returns to Lórien, which is now empty of Elves, and her "passing away" is directly compared to Galadriel's, emphasising what she has lost, life with her family over the Sea, but not what she might gain, an afterlife.

Throughout the description of Arwen's death, Tolkien emphasises silence and cold: "Arwen went forth from the House, and the light of her eyes was quenched, and it seemed to her people that she had become cold and grey as

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[167] Flieger, 1997, p. 114

[168] *LotR*, Appendix A, p. 377

[169] *LotR*, Appendix A, p. 377

[170] *LotR*, Appendix A, p. 378

nightfall in winter that comes without a star".[171] From being known as Evenstar, tying her more closely to the heavens than most of her people, she has completely lost that connection to the stars and hence the symbolic connection to the Elves, leaving her entirely alone to face her human fate. It is no accident that Arwen goes to Lórien to die. In fact, her return to Elvish space could be an attempt to recapture the timelessness that marked that particular land, but if so, the attempt is futile, as the trees are "fading" and, for the first time in the book, at least, winter comes to Lórien. The mallorn-leaves fall without being replenished as they do so, and this movement from timelessness back into mortal time, perhaps more than anything else, is an indicator of the true ending of the Elves' influence in Middle-earth.

When Arwen leaves her home and "passes away" – again emphasising her imminent demise – to Lórien, she "dwelt alone under the fading trees until winter came... the land was silent".[172] Once again, she is surrounded by cold and by silence, whereas Aragorn dies surrounded by those who love him. She finally dies before spring arrives to bring the mallorn-trees into bloom, where just a few years before the trees would never have lost their leaves at all, and Tolkien leaves us with the reminder that she will not even have the kind of lasting life that comes with being remembered because eventually, "all the days of her life [will be] utterly forgotten by men".[173] It seems, then, that near the end, the Elvish attitude to death, should Elves be able to die, would be

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[171] *LotR*, Appendix A, p. 378

[172] *LotR*, Appendix A, p. 378

[173] *LotR*, Appendix A, p. 378

fairly similar to that of those Men that, to quote Dylan Thomas, "rage against the dying of the light".

Death and Change

While Aragorn and Arwen die in ways that exemplify Tolkien's ideas about the spiritual side of death, one of his characters illustrates the other reason for Tolkien's comparison of Elves and men: change. In *Return of the King*, Denethor's death is a dramatic display of what might happen if humans adopt the same attitude to change as Elves have. When Denethor discovers that, in addition to the death of his oldest son, Borimir, he seems likely to lose Faramir, his youngest, as well, he descends into grief-fuelled madness and attempts to burn both Faramir and himself on a pyre in the House of the Stewards. While he rails to Gandalf about various paranoid ideas inspired by his use of the palantír, Gandalf asks him, "What then would you have, if your will could have its way?" Denethor responds, "I would have things as they were in all the days of my life, and in the days of my longfathers before me... But if doom denies this to me, then I will have *naught*: neither life diminished, nor love halved, nor honour abated".[174] If Denethor cannot have everything the way it used to be, completely unchanged, then he refuses to have anything at all. Flieger says:

> [The Elves] do not grow old, they do not die, they keep their strength and their beauty. And thus they illustrate by their very preservation the danger to faith in a fallen world of clinging to the present, which inevitably becomes living in the past. Over against this, his Men – and his Hobbits – illustrate, with the consequent pain and loss of all that seems most precious, the absolute

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[174] *RotK*, p. 131

> necessity of letting go, of trusting in the unknown future, of having faith in God.[175]

Denethor has lost his faith entirely – in any kind of god, in the future, in the present – and thus cannot let go, cannot trust that they have any chance at all of defeating Sauron or that his son might live. His resultant despair leads to him immolating himself, dying violently, in flames, which epitomises the negative consequences should a human refuse to embrace change in the way that Elves do.

What is interesting to note in this section is that Tolkien clearly shows that Denethor's reactions are largely due to Sauron's influence, worked on him through the palantír. The end result of Sauron's machinations is that Denethor refuses change, completely and without reason. His is, in essence, an amplification of the Elvish aversion to change. This is probably the most obvious condemnation of that attitude to be found in *The Lord of the Rings*, and the inevitability of change is driven home when, after Denethor is dead, Gandalf says, "And so pass also the days of Gondor that you have known; for good or evil they are ended".[176] In short, death is necessary to allow change.

Eucatastrophe as Consolation

The previous chapter touched on Tolkien's idea of "Escape from Death": humans desire the kind of immortality that Elves enjoy. However, they may not realise the kind of burdens that accompany it. Tolkien uses *The Lord of the Rings* to remind the reader that deathlessness is not something to strive

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[175] Flieger, 1997, p. 114

[176] *RotK*, p. 132

for; those that have it might find that it creates more problems than it solves. Nevertheless, the escape from death, which is not necessarily the same as Escape from Death, is a key part of the third of Tolkien's functions of fairy stories: consolation. Escape from death occurs when, in a story, the heroes face overwhelming odds and survive and reach a happy ending. The consolation of fairy stories lies in the joy resulting from that happy ending – or the "turn", since, as Tolkien points out, fairy tales have no true end. What Tolkien calls the "Consolation of the Happy Ending" is far more important, he says, than escape[177] because it alludes to something that is not only temporary,. as escape must be. Consolation is the highest function of fairy stories: to provide a joy that is "greater than the event described".[178] This escape from death can, at times, remind the reader of the joy brought about the Escape from Death, which is the eternal life given to humans rather than the serial living granted to Elves.

This is where the eucatastrophe discussed in the Introduction comes in. Eucatastrophe is the name Tolkien gave to the "turn" in fairy tales when the hero is plucked from the jaws of defeat, of sorrow, and given a happy ending that brings joy to the reader. This is not an escapist joy; "in its fairy-tale – or otherworld – setting, it is a sudden and miraculous grace: never to be counted on to recur".[179] It is miraculous because of the possibility, even the overwhelming possibility, of dyscatastrophe, of sorrow and failure. Simply put, the avoidance of dyscatastrophe results in eucatastrophe, which is more than

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[177] Tolkien, 1964, p. 60

[178] Tolkien, 1964, p. 61

[179] Tolkien, 1964, p. 60

just a happy ending. The joy as a result of the happy ending, when combined with the fact that the ending is happy *despite the odds*, results in "the joy of deliverance"; the ending denies "universal final defeat".[180] Because the defeat that is overcome is not merely earthly but representative of something greater, universal, the joy that is caused is also greater than it otherwise would be, reflecting not only happiness within the story but also on a level that Tolkien calls "evangelium" – the "good news that evokes joy"[181] of the Christian mythos. In other words, the joy inspired by the eucatastrophic turn in a fairy story is what Tolkien calls "a far-off gleam or echo of *evangelium* in the real world",[182] the fact that humans can be assured that there is life after death.

In stories themselves, then, eucatastrophe refers to the characters evading death. Noel says, "The most satisfying eucatastrophe occurs when death is eluded entirely and immortal life substituted. This highest form of escape from death was bestowed upon the Ring-bearers and the Guardians of the Elven Rings when they sailed into the West to the Undying Lands".[183] However, this is not quite true. This is the most satisfying eucatastrophe *for a story*, but Tolkien's overarching idea is the reflection of eucatastrophe in real life. This means that the highest form of escape from death can really only be found after death. "The Elves can hope for nothing higher than memory," says Caldecott, "A frozen image of perfect beauty in the Far West... But Men are

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[180] Tolkien, 1964, p. 60

[181] Flieger, 2002, p. 28

[182] Tolkien, 1964, p. 62

[183] Noel, 1977, p. 32

not Elves, and the hope of Men transcends time".[184] Men can die, but the gospel says that there is life after death, and that is the "Great Eucatastrophe" that applies to everyone in the Primary World, not just characters in a Secondary World. This is one of the reasons why Tolkien called *The Lord of the Rings* "fundamentally religious and Catholic"[185] – because despite the overt lack of religion in the book, his treatment of the differences between Elves and Men reveals a deep faith in the tenets of Catholicism and its promise of a life after death.

A number of deaths occur within the book, but the human deaths are not what convey Tolkien's point. The clearest contrast between Elves and humans is the difference between Elves sailing to Valinor and Aragorn facing his death without fear. When Frodo sails from the Havens, the scene is described as a sort of silent parade. Elrond, Galadriel, and "many Elves of the High Kindred" all escort Sam and Frodo to the Havens, where they are met by Merry, Pippin, and Gandalf. In essence, Frodo's departure is portrayed as a bittersweet celebration as he leaves for Valinor, to all intents and purposes dying: "Although they went beyond death to the Blessed Realm, the travellers went beyond the living world as well, and endured a poignant separation from their lands and kin".[186] After Frodo leaves, though, the narrative turns its attention elsewhere, following the living rather than the "dead". Once he has "passed away" – a term used to describe Galadriel's leaving for Valinor as well, though not generally to describe actual death – it is as though he really has died

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[184] Caldecott, 1999, p.26-7

[185] Tolkien, 1964, p. 36

[186] Noel, 1977, p. 32

because he has no further place in the narrative. This reflects the idea that the inhabitants of Valinor have no real relevance in the world as a whole, even though they cannot leave it.

Aragorn, on the other hand, dies with only Arwen near him rather than being seen off by a large procession. However, the narrative implies that he continues, in a way, after his death:

> Then a great beauty was revealed in him, so that all who after came there looked on him in wonder; for they saw that the grace of his youth, and the valour of his manhood, and the wisdom and majesty of his age were blended together. And long there he lay, an image of the splendour of the Kings of Men in glory undimmed before the breaking of the world.[187]

It seems, then, that Aragorn continues in some way in Middle-earth even after his death: his "glory" will last until the "breaking of the world". This, combined with the faith he expresses earlier about an afterlife, implies that he also continues in some other way or some other place. Arwen falls somewhere between Frodo and Aragorn; the degree of her faith is uncertain, and whether she continues after death is ambiguous. The images Tolkien describes around her grave do seem to hint at a lasting memory of her – which in turn hints at lasting afterlife – but unlike Aragorn's memory, hers will last only until "the world is changed... and elanor and niphredil bloom no more east of the Sea".[188] This ambiguity could be due to Arwen choosing mortality rather than being mortal by birth – Tolkien seems to believe that, in some way, Elves are less worthy than humans, and the Gift of Iluvatar was given to Men, not to

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[187] *LotR*, Appendix A, p. 378

[188] *LotR*, Appendix A, p. 378

Elves. It could also be due to the fact that she shows less acceptance of what is coming than Aragorn.

The question of why Tolkien would bring in Aragorn's death in the Appendix after allowing him to take part in the eucatastrophe in the book itself – he overcomes overwhelming odds in war to become the new king of Gondor – is answered as easily as it is asked. Tolkien is undermining the eucatastrophe of the book in order to solidify the notion of the Great Eucatastrophe in the Appendix: any escape from death in a fairy story can be only temporary, but to die and face what comes afterward is to find true immortality, the only true escape from death. It seems, then, that Tolkien wanted to show both kinds of consolation. He uses Elves to show the lesser kind, the simple fairy tale happy ending that causes joy because it denies sorrow: Frodo, Bilbo, and eventually Sam are permitted to go to Valinor with the Elves and, debatably, experience the immortality that the Elves enjoy. Humans, however, bring in the Great Consolation about which Tolkien wrote with such enthusiasm. Aragorn admits to Arwen that he can offer her no comfort for her grief "within the circles of the world", but Arwen's sorrow at his death is immediately contrasted with the sense of peace surrounding his body once he dies. He has escaped death in a greater sense than Frodo does, and Tolkien no doubt intended this to give the reader greater joy than Frodo's departure.

CONCLUSION

In Defence of Fantasy

In *On Fairy-Stories*, Tolkien makes a compelling argument for the necessity of sub-creation. Secondary Worlds created by fantasy are uniquely suited to performing the three functions upon which he places so much importance: recovery, escape, and consolation. These cannot be encouraged, or if they can, they can certainly not be brought about with the same effectiveness or on the same level, without those Secondary Worlds. More than necessary, in fact, sub-creation is inevitable; Tolkien argues that it is inherent in language. "The incarnate mind, the tongue, and the tale," he says, "are all coeval".[189] People who can understand that things exist will want to name them; once those things have been named, it is only a matter of time until stories are created around them. Tolkien places great stock in the adjective as contributing to sub-creation:

> [H]ow powerful, how stimulating to the faculty that produced it, was the invention of the adjective: no spell or incantation in Faërie is more potent. And that is not surprising: such incantations might indeed be said to be only another view of adjectives, a part of speech in a mythical grammar. The mind that thought of *light, heavy, grey, yellow, still, swift*, also conceived of magic that would make heavy things light and able to fly, turn grey lead into yellow gold, and the still rock into swift water. If it could do the one, it could do the other; it inevitably did both.[190]

In other words, the creative imagination with which man has been blessed will always and inevitably lead to some kind of sub-creation. Often, as occurs with

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[189] Tolkien, 1964, p. 25

[190] Tolkien, 1964, p. 25

many myths, the worlds thus created will contain at least an element of fantasy.

That fantasy can be more valuable than many people realise. Many people see fantasy as an inferior form of literature; Patrick Curry points out that "[t]he single greatest obstacle to appreciating Tolkien's work is sheer literary snobbery".[191] Despite this, fantasy has its place. James Prothero argues that it should be treated with a degree of respect in that it is capable of teaching values today in the same way that mythology taught them in the past. He says, "Myth teaches meaning, not by realistic logical exposition but rather by imagination and metaphor, entering the back door of the mind through the imagination"[192] – and since he sees fantasy as the modern-day equivalent of myth, the same concept applies. Characters in books are capable of capturing the imagination and using that to teach behaviour, and, Prothero says, fantasy books generally have heroes worth emulating. He continues, "Reason may answer the question 'What?' but only imagination can answer the question 'Why?' The post-industrial assumption that humankind needs only cold, hard facts and scientific reason is culturally disastrous and psychologically naïve".[193] By appealing to imagination, fantasy can give depth to moral codes that might otherwise be difficult to teach, despite the general disdain with which the genre is often viewed.

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[191] Curry, 1998, p. 19

[192] Prothero, 1990, p. 33

[193] Prothero, 1990, p. 33

As well as a kind of didactic function, which Prothero discusses mostly in relation to children but which could apply equally well to adults, fantasy has the three functions described by Tolkien and discussed in Chapter One to Three. In *On Fairy Stories*, Tolkien discusses at length the tendency of modern critics to see the ideas of fantasy and escape in a negative light and disagrees with the inclination to dismiss fantasy as a matter for children. He believes that it is just as legitimate a form of literature as the more highly regarded realist fiction and that it should not be disregarded merely because it focuses on different things: "Much that [many people] would call 'serious' literature is no more than play under a glass roof by the side of a municipal swimming-bath. Fairy-stories may invent monsters that fly in the air or dwell in the deep, but at least they do not try to escape from heaven or the sea".[194] In other words, fantasy is valuable *as literature* in the same way that other genres are valuable, as well as in its ability to perform recovery, escape, and consolation.

Tolkien can enact his three functions on two levels in *The Lord of the Rings*: in the "normal" Secondary World of Middle-earth and in the magical realms of the Elves. Middle-earth as a whole is far enough from the Primary world to effect recovery, to allow escape, and to enable consolation – one could hardly deny that Sam and Frodo's rescue and the destruction of Sauron as Aragorn's army was facing defeat elicit the joy of the happy ending that Tolkien refers to in *On Fairy-Stories*. However, through the Elves, Tolkien is able to add another layer of depth to those functions. As discussed, the way the Elves

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[194] Tolkien, 1964, p. 56

delineate the borders of their space and the way they approach time creates a kind of Secondary World inside a Secondary World that contains a distilled form of Other Time. While this removal from Middle-earth as a whole is ultimately negative for the Elves themselves, it can have a positive effect on the reader.

Though there are many beautiful places in *The Lord of the Rings,* few are described with the same degree of awe and wistfulness as the Elvish places, with Lórien as the focal point of those emotions. The beauty described in Middle-earth as a whole is ordinary, and while it might effect recovery in the reader, it is just as possible that the reader will take it for granted as an extension of the beauty available in everyday life. Lórien, on the other hand, is beautiful in an ethereal sense, and Tolkien makes clear the desirability of that location. The presence of the Elves contributes to this otherworldliness: they are presented as a mystical race whose very inaccessibility increase the mystery that surrounds them, and anything placed in conjunction with them comes across as more special than it might otherwise be. Because the Elves have separated themselves to such a degree, entrance into their space is a shock of splendour that can jolt the reader into seeing the world anew.

Something different happens with escape, however. The Elves have a distilled version of the human desire for escape: Tolkien describes this desire as wanting to "fly from" negative aspects of the world such as pain and sorrow and of wanting to "converse with all living things".[195] Elves almost embody

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[195] Tolkien, 1963, p. 58

these desires. Treebeard says that they "always wished to talk to everything",[196] and their desire to escape the sorrow of remaining the same as the world changes and dies around them is what drives their acts of separation because they want a way to stop the passing of time, at least in some small areas; they want to avoid change. This, then, leads to the warning about the creative sterility that results from this: the Elvish civilisation is not open to new experiences and as such cannot really stay relevant in a changing world. Because of this, while Tolkien is able to use Lórien as a locus of escape for the characters and for the reader, a welcome rest from the harrowing experiences in the book, he is also able to use it as a warning. Escape to some degree is good, but, as indicated by the main characters always leaving Elvish space and time and returning to mortal space and time, where changes important to Middle-earth take place, that escape should only be temporary.

The function that Tolkien is most able to emphasise by using the Elves is that of consolation. As discussed in Chapter Three, he compares the immortality of the Elves to the mortality of the humans to demonstrate that while the Elves have an extended lifespan, their prolonged existence is essentially empty, nothing but "serial living". Humans, on the other hand, must face the idea of hope without certainty, but what they have to hope for is true eternal life of a kind much more valuable than the long life granted to Elves. The consolation in the book thus works on three levels. The first is the kind of consolation felt when the happy ending, the "turn", comes into play: the joy of deliverance,

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[196] *TTT*, p. 84

denying "universal final defeat".[197] The second is felt on a higher level, reflecting more clearly the Great Eucatastrophe to which Tolkien refers, when Frodo, Bilbo and, eventually, Sam escape death to live with the Elves in the Undying Lands. The final and most powerful consolation is present when Tolkien compares humans and Elves, in particular with the death of Arwen and Aragorn, not just reflecting that Great Eucatastrophe but referring to it fairly explicitly with Aragorn's reassurances to Arwen.

Fantasy, then, is worth examining more closely; Prothero argues that fantasy and science fiction should be taught as "present-day forms of mythology", since they offer a way to teach values and are "every bit as 'serious' as mainstream fiction".[198] While Aragorn, Sam, or Frodo might seem to be the heroes most worth emulating in *The Lord of the Rings*, the Elves demonstrate their fair share of bravery as well. For example, despite their deep dislike of change and despite the knowledge that it will result in their fading completely from Middle-earth, they aid in the destruction of the Ring and Galadriel turns down the offer of it: they are willing to face, at last, what they have been avoiding for so long because it is necessary for the good of the whole of Middle-earth, not only for themselves. Thus, while the Elves are portrayed as rather too distant and numinous to be easy to identify with, in the end, they still demonstrate the kind of behaviour that could be seen as admirable. It seems safe to say, however, that Tolkien was more focused on using them to enhance the ability of *The Lord of the Rings* to perform the three functions he

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[197] Tolkien, 1964, p. 60

[198] Prothero, 1990, p. 33

deemed necessary for fantasy in general, and it is equally safe to say that he succeeded.

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